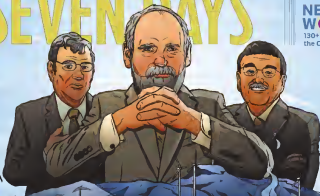


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By Ken Picard [see 10](#)

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The first quote is in *Philadelphia* and Mr. February 11, Streep, who claims never to have heard of anyone getting married where there isn't some stress between the mother and the daughter, must not be aware of the fact that in Vermont we allow a man to marry another man. At my wedding to my husband, there was no stress between my mother and my daughter. Nor was there any stress between any mother and any son. Streep entitled to her views, butly quoting her so prominently, the editors perpetuated an incorrect assumption regarding marriage. Marriage is between two people who love each other, even if neither of them is anybody's daughter.

Mark S. Westergaard  
University of Colorado, USA

### WHAT THE FRACK?

A statement on hydraulic fracturing in Vermont is elusive ("Frack, No Vermont Looks North to Quebec as It Considers a Ban on Natural-Gas Drilling," February 11). In the first place, we don't even know if we can get at it. In the second place, if we could, it'd really reduce heating bills for up to 200,000 Vermonters by 50 percent or more. Rather than putting the idea on ice, the legislature should permit more study of it, and set terms for drillers to ensure both water quality and a good deal for Vermont energy consumers.

The reality is that if we don't get it, Quebec will, and then sell it back to us at a hefty markup. That would be a disastrous failure.

**Russel Whelanlock**  
FOR PUBLICATION

## MY ANALYSIS

[Re "The Stars and the Fery and the Banjo," February 1] I was at that show until the end, drank a half and, looking out to Avenida - I even got a signed set list to take home with me. You said, "The show ends after Dymally and his crew run through their song 'Skin' during which a sex-percuss mesh pot craps - though it could be described as a frenetic hug." That was a woman hug at the end. (Mimi) = Love.

**Cindy Marcelle**  
SOUTH AFRICA

## NEWBORNS AREN'T ADDICTS

Kudos and criticism for a very positive article on treating pregnant, opioid-dependent women ("A Chittenden County Program Helps Pregnant Addicts Become Successful Moms," February 1). First, it's most important to emphasize, as you do, the enormous benefit

associated with methadone (and more recently, buprenorphine as well) for both the pregnant woman and her child. The very favorable treatment outcomes were noted in a 2009 State of Vermont publication co-authored by Marjorie Meyer, a physician member of the CHARM program that is the focus of your report. "Methadone is considered the medication of choice for treatment of opiate dependency in pregnancy. There is no warning list in Vermont at any of these [methadone maintenance] clinics for a pregnant woman who is opiate addicted."

As far criticism, it is simply wrong to describe newborns as "addicted." Addiction is the compulsive, uncontrolled use of a substance, generally under rational conditions — clearly not a term that applies to neonates. Sadly, it most definitely is a label that will carry with it all the bad stories.

Robert G. Newman, MD  
NEW YORK, N.Y.

Newman is director of the Aaron Edward de Barchfeld Chemical Dependency Institute at New York's Beth Israel Medical Center.

## RADIO HEAD

Just want to say that Don Mullally is the reason that I — and countless others — pursued a career as radio [Mr. Saint Johnsbury, December 16, 2011]. I was interviewed by him on WTVR and thought I had realized my 15 minutes of fame, being in the same room! He was so ahead my dad played in and generally was an enormous influence on my life. When I grow up, I want to be just like him! May he have many more fantastic years!

**Karen Finckh**  
LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY, INDIANA

## PATIENTS WANT FILM CLINIC

I admit I am not a faithful Screen Dept reader. I read it maybe every other

ESTIMATING THE FISH

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— Joe Davis, words at Seven

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# New TO THE Crew

Over the past few months *Seven Days* has hired several new staffers. You may have noticed their work already. Some wrote for the newspaper and the website, and some operate behind the scenes. All of them are now contributing to the success of this locally owned media company. How did we find them? When we advertised openings, we used help wanted ads in *Seven Days*. Please join us in welcoming them to the team...

## SEVEN DAYS

sevendaysvt.com

*Seven Days*, Vermont's award-winning independent weekly newspaper, was founded in 1995 by Pamela Polizer and Paula Root. It's available at more than 1000 locations in Vermont and Post-Dispatch, N.H. and is online at [sevendaysvt.com](http://sevendaysvt.com).

### Kathryn Flagg, Staff Writer



Kathryn Flagg started her career in journalism at the *Adelphi Independent* in 2008, after graduating from Middlebury College. In 2009 she joined the *New England Newspaper and Press Association* as an editor. As the first staff writer, Kathryn caught the prize for Best State Story from the Vermont Press Association in 2013. After two years, she left the *Adelphi* to enroll in the Master of Fine Arts writing program at the University of Wyoming, and simultaneously as a fellowship as a seasonal journalist through Middlebury College. In Wyoming, she pursued her MFA, while working on environmental reportage projects, including a viral smoking story that took her all the way to China. In January, Kathryn returned to *Seven Days*, where she and her husband raise their first son. *Seven Days* published her first story, "Leaving Backstage" on February 5.

### Paul Heints, Staff Writer



Before graduating from Bowdoin College in 2008, Paul Heints worked as an intern with *WGBH's "Circles of Influence"*, after graduation he spent several months as a desk assistant for "The Newsmakers with Jim Lehrer" before taking a job as a reporter for the *Providence Journal* in 2008. He pulled the 740-mile Northern Forest Cutoff Trail and then commuted to the dark side — he moved to Washington, DC to become a communications director for Rep. Peter Welch. In 2010, Paul had the dubious distinction of winning the first and only *Seven Days* award for "True Place." Then, in 2011, he felt the need to chase his soul, so he quit his job and spent five months half-monthly taking the EH&E online Appalachian Trail. He's been back in Vermont and on the job since February 1. Now Paul spends his days writing on his laptop at coffee shops, jamming out to Tey and the boys, and posting to the #B5Vermont hashtag.

### Emily Rose, Sales Assistant



Emily Rose is a newly minted graduate of The American and French Communication program at Middlebury College. While a student at St. Michael's, Emily interned at Her House Media, and co-produced and directed a short movie, "First I Said By Frequent." When she's not supporting the sales team, Emily is working, practicing kitchen yoga or finding craft projects on Pinterest.

### Bohdy Hockney, Designer



Bohdy Hockney joined the *Seven Days* design staff in January but you may have seen him in these pages before that. At the head corner of the Burlington-based band Rough Francis, Bohdy has been around not only on *Seven Days*, but also on NPR from the New York Times. He studied fine arts and graphic design at the Community College of Vermont, and is working on earning his bachelor's degree from the Art Institute of Portland, Maine. Bohdy also works with Burlington, Maine, and New York design work for South Burlington creative venue Higher Ground.

### Justin Gonyea, Production Manager



Justin Gonyea is another designer by day, musician by night. He moved to Vermont from Boston to get a bachelor of fine arts in graphic design from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. He worked most recently as the art director for AMG Creative, the in-house production studio responsible for advertising for the Art National Guard. He took over as the *Seven Days* production department in November. Justin is also the cofounder of Get Broke! Records, a DIY label whose members in Our L.L.L.L. of a Conspiracy, a Rockin' from Boston like safety group called Helping Myself Live Longer. He plays guitar in local punk bands including Hanger and No Submission.

Kids VT, *Seven Days*'s monthly parenting magazine, has also added two new staffers.

### Becky Sharp, Calendar Writer



Even before she started writing the Kids VT calendar in December, Becky Sharp used to help find activities to enjoy with her family. Becky works part time on the calendar and is a collaborator with the *Seven Days* design team. She has a master's degree in journalism from the University of Vermont and a bachelor's degree from Harvard University. Before coming to Kids VT, Becky worked as an administrator for Ocean Ark International.

### Kaitlin Montgomery, Account Executive



Kaitlin Montgomery is the only member of the Kids VT staff with a master's degree in education, she earned her MA at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, IL, after graduating with a bachelor's degree from the University of Iowa. Her undergraduate history in Iowa city Chicago led her before moving to Boston, where she started her sales career as the manager of media relations for TV Compass. Connected her way to Vermont. Kaitlin's favorite thing Kids VT staff is her love for the Internet Movie Database — she played Kevin Costner's daughter in the 1987 film *The Untouchables*.



Kids VT is Vermont's only parenting publication. Pick it up for free at more than 400 locations across northern and central Vermont, and find it on the web at [kidsvt.com](http://kidsvt.com).



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LOOKING FORWARD



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FAIR GAME OPEN SEASON ON VERMONT POLITICS BY ANET SHADMAE



## A Bernie Sanders Super PAC?

**S**hould political candidates who not against super PACs accept help from them when facing opponents bankrolled by billionaire benefactors such as **SEN. RANDOLPH LAMONT**? Or should they take principled stand and reject the corrupting influence of unlimited super-PAC dough — even if it could cost them the election?

President **BARACK OBAMA** answered the question last week — making major moves in the process — when his aides announced that the Obama campaign would begin joining the main Democratic super PAC, Priorities USA Action, in raising funds for his reelection. Obama has been an outspoken critic of the U.S. Supreme Court rulings that destroyed campaign fundraising limits, memorably warning the justices for the Citizens United decision at his 2008 state-of-the-union speech. The Supreme Court just a few days away.

But with Obama's approval ratings at the danger zone and Republican super PACs dwarfing their Democratic counterparts, Obama campaign manager **AMY KLOBUCHAR** blazed last week that "with so much at stake" the campaign would not "unilaterally disarm" by foregoing super PACs.

Unsurprisingly, conservatives accused Obama of hypocrisy.

Slightly more surprisingly, the New York Times slammed Obama for abandoning the "higher ground," editorializing that his decision "fully implicates the president, his campaign and his administration in the pollution of the political system unleashed by Citizens United and related court decisions."

In Vermont, there's been no harsher critic of super PACs and Citizens United than Sen. **BERNIE SANDERS** (I-VT). He has introduced a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United and is backing a resolution opposing "corporate personhood" that some 40 Vermont towns will take up in Town Meeting Day elections on March 6.

When Sanders warns, "We are evolving very rapidly into a political system where members of the House and Senate are going to be literally owned and controlled by their corporate sponsors," he doesn't sound like your usual pull-tooled politician. He sounds like he means it.

But in an age of the news, even Sanders

says he couldn't rule out accepting help from a super PAC if push came to shove. In an interview in his Burlington office earlier this week, Vermont's junior senator told Fair Game that if faced with a super-PAC-financed opponent this fall, a Sanders-supported super PAC is "something we would look at. But I hope we're not going to have to."

THESE ARE NO MEMBERS  
OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE  
THAT WALL STREET,  
THE OIL COMPANIES,  
THE COAL COMPANIES,  
THE MILITARY-  
INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX  
WOULD LIKE TO DEFEAT  
MORE THAN ME.

SEN. BERNIE SANDERS

Sanders is up for reelection in November. So far, he's running unopposed. But he's amassed a war chest of close to \$4 million, he says, in the event a well-financed challenger emerges.

"There is no member of the United States Senate that Wall Street, the oil companies, the coal companies, the military-industrial complex would like to defeat more than me," Sanders says, before adding, "I think it's not going to happen. So I think that's kind of a hypothetical question that I'm not going to have to deal with. But we can chat about it if we members from here, many, many millions of dollars are coming in standing me."

Sanders says he and other anti-super-PAC politicians face the same dilemma as Obama.

"What [Obama] is saying is, 'Fine, I shudder the idea of a super PAC. But what do you really want me to do? You want me to allow 11 billionaires and corporate leaders to spend huge sums of money against me and I don't have the ability to respond?' Sanders says. "You could say that holding up the correct moral position would generate a lot of public

support. Politically it might be good for him. On the other hand, he will argue that he doesn't want to be in a position where he's outspent two or three to one."

Neither does Bernie. If anti-Sanders forces start dumping millions into the race this fall, look for a white-haired, bespectacled senator with one hand outstretched — palm open — and the other firmly holding his nose.

(Read the whole interview with Sanders, including his thoughts on the Burlington Mayor's race, on the *Seven Days* at [blog.7daysvt.com](http://blog.7daysvt.com).)

### A Random Encounter in a Montpelier Alleyway

GUY IN TRENCH COAT Put hey, buddy. Wanna buy some transmission fluid?

VERMONT TAXPAYER: Who, me?

GUYC: Yeah, you. Wanna buy a majority stake in VELCO?

VT VIL: what?

GUYC: VELCO, Vermont Electric Power Company. You know, the folks who manage the high-voltage transmission lines that move power through the state. VT: Why would I want to buy that?

GUYC: Because you could make a fortune! It's a guaranteed 34 percent return on your investment.

VT: Fasten your seat belt, dude, that's pretty good. How much do I have to invest?

GUYC: \$400 million.

VT: \$400 million? Are you nuts? For power lines? Even if I had \$400 million, why would I invest it in power lines and not public schools or homeless shelters or something like that?

GUYC: Owning power lines is like owning a tollbooth on the only road in town. Everyone has to pass through it, so everyone has to pay. It's a cash cow!

VT: Well, what if the power lines need millions of dollars' worth of upgrades? Would I, as a majority owner, be on the hook to pay for that?

GUYC: Well, technically, yes. But you'd make a lot of cash! Nevertheless, it's pretty return. Guaranteed?

VT: I dunno. Maybe we should study the pros and cons of such a big purchase before diving in.

GUYC: Great idea. That'll only cost you \$140,000.

VT: Well, that doesn't sound so bad.

GUYC: It won't. But we need the money now, 'cause the state's going to lose by April.

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**VT By April?** That seems kinda silly for setting such a big purchase. Why the rush?

**GITC:** Well, that's a little complicated. You see, Vermont's two biggest electric utilities — Green Mountain Power and Central Vermont Public Service — want to merge in May. And if they do, the merged company — which would be owned by Canadian, by the way — will own a majority stake in VELCO and control that lifeline.

The Canadians could build new power lines through your backyard or use Vermont's transmission system as a thoroughfare to pump power to New York! And the state would be powerless to stop them. It's all very lucrative... for whoever owns VELCO.

**VT:** Wait a second. What's behind this idea to purchase VELCO?

**GITC:** The main mover is Sen. **WALTER D. LANE** (Vermont). He wants to condition approval of the Green Mountain Power merger on the state buying back VELCO.

**VT:** Huh, eh? Wasn't he the guy who wanted the state to buy the Connecticut River hydro dam a decade ago?

**GITC:** Yeah, and the state didn't do it. Big mistake. This is just like that — only the state has a chance to get it right this time.

**VT:** By spending \$500 million?  
**GITC:** Exactly. Trust me, it's good deal. Nothing could possibly go wrong. And if you believe that, I've got a covered bridge to sell you...

## Occupancy an Auditorium

College campuses saw some of the fiercest clashes between police and Occupy Wall Street protesters last year. Remember the roughing up of former pact lobbyist **ROBERT PETER** at the University of California, Berkeley?

The worst incident — the famous pepper spraying of a dorma peaceful student protesters by University of California, Davis police — spiraled widespread condemnation. For many, it was the defining image of the Occupy movement.

Goddard College president **ANNEKA WILSON** was outraged that higher educators deployed riot police in response to student occupations. Her response? Organize a first-over Occupy Conference at Goddard to explore the ramifications of the Occupy Wall Street movement for higher education and the nation.

"We all say we want to nurture and cultivate students who are going to change the world," Wilson tells *Five Star News*. "Then when they do to it,

we call the police. They get pepper sprayed."

The March 10 event will feature panel discussions that cover OWS origins, ways to "inspire in potential" and how colleges can respond to student activities "without calling the police."

Headlining the conflict will be **LEE LASPICA**, author of *The Looting of America*, plus two key players in the national Occupy movement: **ANN HARRIS**, who facilitated the first general assembly in New York's Zuccotti Park and will do the same thing at Goddard, and **DAVID WATSON**, who organized the ill-fated Brooklyn Bridge march. Moderating will be **ANNE GARDNER** of the news website VTigger and **DAVID WATSON** of Chelsea Green Publishing (and, by the way, the former author of the column).

Tickets are \$10 and seating is limited. Though if it sells out, you could always just occupy the conference in protest. What to Goddard gonna do — call the campus police?

## Media Notes

A group of Burlington lefties is raising money to bring Free Speech TV to Burlington. Telecon's lineup:

**FS-TV** is a 24-hour, commercial-free news station that airs "Democracy Now!", "The Thom Hartmann Program" (including the weekly "Branch with Bernie"), "Gay USA," and independent documentaries and interviews you won't find on Fox News or the Drudge Report.

The Friends of Free Speech TV in Burlington — a group that includes **GARY FLYNN**, **HELEN MULLIN**, **JOHN MATHIAS**, **LAUREN GLENN**, **DAVID WATSON**, and **DAVID WATSON** — has pledged \$10,000 toward the \$10,000 start-up cost and has until March 1 to raise the rest on Kickstarter. As of last week, they needed about \$3,200.

Says Mayfield, an independent filmmaker who financed her labor documentary, *Whorehouse* (using Kickstarter, "We absolutely need media that shine a light on dark places.")

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# Has Wanda Hines Improved Race Relations in Burlington? Depends Who You Ask

BY PAUL HEINTZ

**W**hen asked why she wants to be Burlington's next mayor, Wanda Hines doesn't hesitate: "I think the whole reason I got into this race is that I felt there wasn't a viable candidate for the community I represent," she says.

Pressed to define that community, she is just as likely to rattle off the names of old North End families with whom she grew up — the Hells, Alfordis, Horowitz, Moravia — as she is to list the demographic groups with whom she self-identifies. ("Single mother, gay, lesbian, minority woman.")

Hines will up her community includes "the people I grew up with since the '60s" and "the people who educated me as Progressives in the '80s."

The way she tells it, if anyone's prepared to represent Burlington's biological, socioeconomic and ethnic diversity it's Wanda Hines.

"I'm just a biased representative, is what I say," she says.

And yet, in her role as director of the Racial Equity Investment Project, or REIP, a city position designed to bolster the representation and inclusion of Burlington's nonwhite communities, Hines has earned mixed reviews.

Her critics contend that she has turned off potential partners and failed to take concrete steps to bring diversity to city hall. Others say Burlington's inability to include a broader cross section of the city's population in decision-making positions is the fault of her bosses alone, who have taken time — on a 30-hour-week, \$120,000-a-year position — with a terribly difficult assignment.

Either way, leaders of Burlington's communities of color are mixed in their assessment that racial tensions in the city are meeting a boiling point and that the next mayor better be ready to address them.

"I truly believe the tipping point is coming to Vermont and that, like the many communities that experienced change in the civil-rights movement, we will in fact experience our own civil-rights movement," says Hal Cohen, founder of Good News Garage and professor at Champlain College. "Do we want to be reactive or proactive? I hope it's the latter. I really think it's going to come down to leadership."

Cohen and other Burlington civil-rights leaders note that people of color account for 15 percent of Vermont's population growth in the past decade — the newcomers are predominantly foreign-born refugees concentrated in Burlington

and its neighboring cities. But, they say, civic institutions have failed to keep pace in that long process. Racial disparities in the city's testing scores have widened. And while African Americans make up just 1 percent of Vermont's population in a whole, Cohen says, they are 12 percent of the state's prisoners.

"I would specifically say that the refusal to seriously address these issues of being — the professional population throughout the city — is a problem, to say the least," says Kristen Jackson, an award-winning poet, a former curator at the Southwestern Institution and now a teacher at Burlington High School. "The tension is out around that topic when it

a financial series of diversity engagement dinners and planned a "diversity and unity retreat" last spring.

"I think the girls involved quite deeply in diversity issues with regard to people's perceptions as city officials," says Hines' boss, CEO director, Lucy Rapchman. "The program has been very successful."

Not everyone is impressed. "Diversity dinners and a resolution are not the easiest 'We deserve more respect,'" says Sara Martinez de Guila, director of the Vermont Multicultural Alliance for Democracy. "I think everyone was hopeful and expecting that REIP was going to provide some guidance and leadership, but it never happened."

has been welcomed as it currently sits. Whatever the cause, Hines' position at CEO has not led to concrete progress."

Jeanine Runzige, a Congolese immigrant who works as a chef at a restaurant in the Burlington Housing Authority, says that Hines is no longer trusted by many in Burlington's immigrant communities.

"Wanda has burned bridges with many in the New American communities. She would only reach out two or three days before a diversity dinner or other event pleading

**MANY OF US EVENTUALLY REALIZED THAT WANDA WAS JUST USING US FOR PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES FOR HER ANNUAL REPORTS AND WEBSITES.**

JEANINE RUNZIGIE

is brought up for discussion. BN bag and it's much more contentious than a lot of people would want to believe."

Hines and Mayor Bob Kiss have a long history of working together. She ran the Children's Emergency Food Shelf for 12 years while he headed up its umbrella organization, the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity. She came to city hall in 2007 — one year after Kiss took office — when he lured her to help lead the Burlington Legacy Project, the later called her with everything she'd done from which she is currently on a leave of absence, as part of the city's Community and Economic Development Office.

"What I wanted was a voice and a person at city hall whose people could look to address racial and social and economic injustice, and Wanda has been that person," Kiss says. "If we didn't have a person and a person like Wanda, we'd have to create one."

Hines' accomplishments include her work on a Vermont and Equity Resolution, which the city council passed last September, calling on boards and commissions to appoint members that better reflect Burlington's population. She has

According to Guila, Hines' initiatives amount to "a laundry list of redefining action items sitting on a file folder."

"Many people in the community, from all backgrounds, feel disappointed that the administration has been content to house a diversity office in city hall without producing deliverables — other than occasional diversity dinners," Guila says. "This is difficult and challenging work, which



PHOTO BY

for up to attend, under the pretense that we needed to show a unified front to those in power to make change happen," Benoit says. "Many of us eventually realized that she was just using us for photo opportunities for her annual reports and website."

To those who criticize her leadership style, Hines responds: "There are just so many constraints and you work under so many with different constraints. I think that it just is people with different enough ideas. It's not as if we're in a community that's doing all the time... so you just have to catch people where you can, and it's not always convenient."

Hines compares that she has within SEBP had the funding and staffing to achieve more. At a recent forum on multiracialism and equity featuring all three candidates for mayor, Hines spoke passionately about the limitations she feels she is up against in her current position.

"It's only a 30-hour-a-week position and I've been doing this job for four and a half years now and it's not enough. It's not enough," she said. "We're not enough when you're the only person of color working at city hall in CT. Our workforce needs to be reflective of this city. I know there's a women of color caucus in the basement, but..." She paused. "It can be lonely."

As mayor, Hines said, she would bring people together and empower them.

"I will never be lonely at city hall because this is my community," she concluded.

Stacey Miller, director of residential life at the University of Vermont, agrees that the underlying problem is not whether Hines is effective at her job but whether she is sufficiently supported by her agencies.

"One person can't do all those things. That's impossible. The fact that she's not one person, that's not OK. That's not enough," Miller says. "It's not solely her responsibility. Unfortunately, she's in a position where she should be specifically that change and also holding those that she works for accountable."

State Rep. Kristin Rios (D-Burlington) believes the Hines administration has overly paid lip service to the troubles of fleeing people of color in Burlington.

"Show us the results," she says. "Who it does the position do if that person is not heard... not given the tools they need to make change happen? What can they point to besides a position?"

While the challenges they face are significant, Miller and Ouellet are encouraged that all three of this year's current candidates took part in the multiracialism forum, as well as a program on Monday at Burlington High School hosted by the group Conversations on Race Now.

At the COBN discussion, Hines opponents, Republican Kurt Wright, and

Democrat Miro Weinberger, each described their experiences growing up in small, mostly white Vermont towns. Wright described his early efforts to disavow friends from enclaves at parties, while Weinberger recalled coping with occasional anti-Semitic remarks made at his expense.

But there have also been some unintended profits in the otherwise respectful and thoughtful discussion about race and politics in the city.

Emphasizing the importance he would place on reaching out to all communities in Burlington, Wright and Ouellet multiracialism forum that if he were elected mayor, "Wanda will have a key role in the administration. I think Wanda does a great job now and I would want Wanda to be an integral part of the administration. Having said that, again, I know Wanda is planning on being the one in charge."

"It's not," Hines interrupted. "And, again, she has a great a chance as anyone," Wright continued. "That's person like Wanda, and there are lots of other people — some people right here in the audience — who would do a great job, so we would be reaching out to those people."

To Jackson, the RIS teacher, Wright's remark evoked of the tolerant and diverse in respect at city hall.

"It struck me like about a thousand horses," Jackson says. "The premonition more of it. And I thought, Oh my, we get one person and she'll be OK. I was seeing there a thing from then."

Says Rios, "People of color are sick of what Kurt did to Wanda, which is, I just want to outreach to you, I just want to have."

These leaders say that while each of the candidates may struggle with issues of race in their own way, the forum has helped bring out the discussion.

"I am optimistic because the issues have been raised now to a higher level," Ouellet says. "It's not just a small circle."

As for Hines, she says her campaign will concentrate on bringing new voices in the table and new voices in the ballot box, she plans an aggressive voter-registration drive in the Old North End, with a focus on New American citizens. And when she gets to city hall — on when she gets back to city hall — she says she will bring with her a new perspective.

"Burlington is definitely at a cultural crossroads a road and a journey that I've been on for some years," Hines says. "As your mayor, I will be a major of change. I will have demonstrated time and again. As your mayor, I will continue down that path." □

Paul Hines will address this during an event at 5:30 on Wednesday, February 15 at NCAM-19.

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## Vermont Software Firms: Taxing the Cloud Has No Silver Lining

BY KATHRYN FLAGG

**W**hen David Borgardale's company got slapped with a six-figure tax bill last year, he wasn't just surprised, he felt blindsided.

Borgardale is the chief financial and technical officer for Innopia, a software company based in Stowe that provides online reservation tools for travel agents, ski resorts and innkeepers. Last year, he received a letter from the state saying he owed taxes going back four years on his company's cloud-based software.

For over a year, the Vermont Department of Taxes has been auditing local businesses such as Innopia that use and sell cloud-based services. The practice has sparked a debate over if and how the technology should be taxed. At least six companies are contesting the back taxes through formal appeals.

Cloud computing includes any activity that uses software stored on a remote server instead of downloading the program onto a personal computer — everything from email to social networking and financial services.

The tax department says cloud computing should be subject to the sales and use tax, just as software purchased in a store or downloaded online is. The reason? As more customers and companies migrate to the cloud, a cash-strapped state is losing out on potential revenue. The department estimates that a sales tax on cloud computing could tally \$3.6 million in taxes for purchases made between 2006 and 2013.



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## BUSINESS

Susan Minsky, a research economist in the state tax department, likens the dilemma to the growth of online book sales as customers purchase from Amazon instead of local bookstores, the same tax base erodes.

"There is this tremendous growth [in cloud computing], and the growth is forecasted to accelerate," says Minsky. "As we become more dependent on these electronic functions, our sales tax isn't able to keep pace."

The policy change came as a surprise to many local tech companies that rely on providing cloud services.

"We were never told about this issue," says John Canning, chairman of the Vermont Software Developers' Alliance, whose members gathered last week to share concerns about the tax.

Frank Claffi, president of the Greater Burlington Industrial Corp., says that taxing cloud computing unfairly disadvantages companies in Vermont's growing tech sector, which Claffi notes is "data, gear, knowledge based" and includes some of the fastest-growing, entrepreneurial companies in the state. Canning worries the cloud tax could chase such businesses out of state.

The debate starts up two main complaints. The first is that the department misread the cloud computing tax on the fly. Rather than let the legislature debate the issue, the department adopted the policy in September 2010 using what's called a technical bulletin, a publication meant to inform taxpayers of changing regulations.

Businesses and tax lawyers complain that technical bulletins — which are not subject to public input or hearings — are a backdoor route to implementing policy changes.

"The technology is changing and the question is, is our tax law evolving to keep up?" asks Brian Murphy, a tax lawyer with the Burlington firm Dewe Knapp McAndrew. "If you want to tax this stuff, don't fix it. Go to the legislature and have a discussion about it."

Another major complaint is that after issuing the bulletin, staffers applied the cloud computing tax back to 2006 — before the bulletin was even published.

"It's the backward looking — the gotcha — that is really problematic," says Paul Hanlon, a Montpelier tax lawyer.

Complicating the matter, few cloud computing tax trends depend on how the

technology is defined. If software used in the cloud is deemed "tangible personal property," then it is taxable, the state as downloaded programs or CD-ROMs purchased at OfficeMax.

If it's a service, on the other hand — like accounting or legal services — it's not taxable. The tax department's 2010 bulletin determined that programs used in cloud computing were equivalent to "tangible personal property," even if the taxpayer didn't actually own the software he or she used.

Tax Commissioner Mary Peterson admits the rule is "very tricky... We

Peterson couldn't tell seven days how many cloud computing tax bills have gone out or how many businesses have paid, though she confirmed the state has received payments.

This isn't the first time the tax department has used technical bulletins to apply a retroactive tax — nor the first time tax lawyers have pushed back. A Vermont Supreme Court ruling found that a 2007 technical bulletin related to property transfer taxes effectively rewrote the tax code without any "underlying purpose or justification."

"They created a rule without any input that was just arbitrary," says Murphy, who was one of 18 tax litigation lawyers working pro bono on behalf of Kelly's Properties, a Shelburne-based real estate company.

Complicating go deeper still, Murphy says that the department has never offered what he considers a reasonable compromise to web taxpayers appealing their audits. Murphy says the Internal Revenue Service will frequently lower bills if both parties agree the tax law is unclear and the taxpayer was acting in good faith. In contrast, Murphy calls the Vermont department's attitude a "scorched-earth" approach.

"I think most of the frustration about [cloud computing] has to do not with whether we should be taxing that or not, but rather the way" the department made the decision, he says.

For her part, Peterson understands the critics of the tax department under the previous administration who claimed there wasn't enough effort to educate taxpayers about changes in policy. She wants to do a better job of it, but warns that outreach can only do so much.

"It's this fine line," she says. "It's your responsibility on some level to figure out what the tax is... We can't always be explaining in advance. There's just too many circumstances out there." ☐

# IT'S THE BACKWARD LOOKING — THE GOTCHA — THAT IS REALLY PROBLEMATIC.

PAUL HANLON

might be getting to the point where we need different models. If indeed we tax this stuff at all." Translation: Fitting old rules to new technology isn't out and dead.

Borgendieck doesn't object to the idea of a sales tax on cloud computing outright. The tax wouldn't cut into Vermont's bottom line, since the company would just collect sales tax from its own customers and pass it on to the state. But the four-year back-tax bill from the state would deal a serious blow to business, Borgendieck says. He wouldn't reveal the amount of the tax bill. The audit isn't complete and he may appeal.

"What we are saying is, if you're going to define our product as tangible personal property or make it subject to tax, you've got to do so in a clear manner," says Borgendieck.

With software companies raising alarm about the tax, the House Ways and Means Committee is considering a exemption on the tax that would refund those who've already paid

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**E** Hampshire Atlas is seeking a community forum to discuss local updates like GEMS on Montpelier, Teen Making Day/Local 3rd Police Hall Open, Rock Kapers and Blue Jams will participate in the event on Thursday February 23 at Capital Plaza held from 7 to 8:30 pm. Info: 233-9604, dcherry@montpeliermaine.org

# Can a Tax Hike Save Montpelier from a Capital Crisis?

BY PAUL HEINTZ

For Carlo Rovetta, there is no shortage of challenges doing business in Montpelier. His upscale downtown pizza shop, *Postme Pie*, was founded twice first — first in May when the Wisconsin River poured seven feet of water into the restaurant's basement pizza area, and again in August when Tropical Storm Irene swept through. Plus, according to Rovetta, insurance premiums are up, the economy is down, his employees have nowhere to park and the town's infrastructure is falling apart.

"When it comes to the merchants, we're all struggling," Rovetta says. "I can't keep — staying up at night wondering if I can make it another month."

Now Montpelier's downtown business owners have a new worry: a pair of ballot items that propose levying a 1 percent local tax on sales, rooms, meals and alcohol that together would raise an estimated \$370,000 a year. The change would effectively shift some of Montpelier's hefty tax burden from residents to those who work, shop and own businesses in the city.

"The merchants are terrified. We're afraid," says Bob Kasson, who owns *Riverside Books* and *Beer Find Books*. "It's a very difficult environment, and it's very frustrating that our leaders are making it even more difficult."

Critics of city government say Montpelier has overreached — that the city just 7555 spends too much on regional transportation and human services, a proposed district heating plant and a 17-member police department. They say Montpelier simply doesn't know how to say no. It has the highest municipal tax burden in the state but can't afford to reduce needs or fix crumbling sidewalks.

"They haven't really looked at a fine enough distinction between wants and needs and, like everybody, the city is going to have to learn to live within its budget," says Terry Koehn, who owns the *Savoy Theater*. "To me it has the feeling of desperation."

The growing is not limited to business owners. Last November, a group of more than 200 residents and property owners signed a letter to Mayor Mary Hogue asking the city council to sign that "the current trajectory of city spending



Bob Kasson at *Riverside Books*

and taxes is not sustainable." Letter signed on city government to find a way to cut the budget by 1 percent.

"Our answer was, if our [property tax] rate keeps going up, it's going to drive out the middle class," suggested Thelma Garlani, who helped draft the letter and is now a candidate for city council.

Hogue says she understands her constituents' complaints that property taxes are too high, noting that while residents paid for just 32 percent of the city budget in 1995, they now pay 46 percent. That shows that residential property values grew faster during that time than nonresidential property values, she claims.

"Montpelier has 3000 residents at night and 20,000 people during the day," she says. "We're happy to host state government and all the army of the

commercial sector, but we're just simply looking for a fair and equitable way of providing the services the visitors to the community ask for."

That's why Hogue is hoping voters will approve the proposed local taxes on commercial services. One measure on the ballot next month would add a 1 percent "local-option tax" to Vermont's existing 5 percent sales tax. Another measure would add 1 percent to the state's existing 89 percent alcohol tax and to the 9 percent rooms and meals tax. City manager Bill Foyner estimates that, after the state takes a 30 percent cut of the new revenue, the two propositions would add \$370,000 to city coffers.

The Vermont municipalities already exercise a local-option tax, and it varies for rooms, meals and alcohol. Most of them are old, enflame shopping or tourist

towns such as Manchester, Stratham, Killington and Madbury. Burlington, South Burlington and Williston also charge extra for the privilege of doing business there.

Hogue believes that a significant portion of that money would come from Montpelier's largest businesses, such as National Life Group, Union Mutual of Vermont and Vermont Mutual Insurance Group. That's because the sales tax applies not just to point-of-sale purchases but also to business overhead costs such as heating oil.

National Life spokeswoman Chris Graft says that since the company spends \$17.5 million a year on sales-tax-eligible purchases, such as software, office supplies and fuel, the company would be subject to an additional \$175,000 in local taxes.



# news

EXCERPTS FROM BLURT,  
THE SEVEN DAYS STAFF BLOG



## Did Wright Help Hines Get on the Ballot?

by Paul Hertz

A provocative piece published last weekend in VT Digger alleges Burlington Republican mayoral candidate Ben Hines helped independent candidate Wendie Hines get on the ballot. His campaign manager, David Harnett, allowed Hines to leave petrioles in the marble entrance.

The story inferred that Wright's campaign helped Hines qualify as a candidate to bolster his own chances, and Hines' reward would be a plum post in his administration.

Problem is, that's not the whole story.

For one thing, Hines never submitted the signatures collected at Harnett's store. She had enough to qualify for the ballot without them. Explaining this after Harnett simply said, "Wendie's a friend of mine."

## McKibben Does Colbert

by Kathryn Hagg

Bill McKibben, Vermont's own global warming, carbon-fighting climate activist, cropped up on national television again this week, as a repeat star to "The Colbert Report." His eye-glancing as satirist, Colbert offered this: "My guest Bill McKibben believes in global warming... so I'm going to deny that he exists."

McKibben was talking up the latest effort by BP and a coalition of environmental advocates to block the controversial Keystone XL pipeline which would carry oil from Canadian tar sands to Gulf of Mexico refineries. Opponents claimed victory in January when the Obama administration denied a permit for the project.

Then Monday, Senate Republicans attached to an unrelated transportation bill that would authorize the Keystone XL pipeline. Once again, environmentalists rallied in opposition to the project. They set a goal to gather 800,000 signatures on an anti-pipeline petition in 24 hours — then knew that gallons of the water in seven hours later.



## Vermont Joins Lawsuit Against EPA Over Soot Pollution

by Kathryn Hagg

Vermont is among 11 states suing the Environmental Protection Agency over soot pollution. The lawsuit, filed in federal court in Manhattan on February 14, aims to force the EPA to reinstate clean air standards.

Joining Vermont in the lawsuit are New York, which has attributes more deaths to particulate pollution than most states, and California, considered to have the worst soot pollution in the nation.

But Vermont?

The Green Mountain State has its own set of air quality concerns, says Dick Valentini, director of the air quality at the Agency of Natural Resources. The state is downgraded from some major polluters, especially coal burning power plants in the Midwest that belch sulfur dioxide and nitrogen. Once here, they transform into a very fine particulate and cause problems with visibility.

"Anytime you go out and take a beautiful picture of a brilliant sunset, a lot of that is a functional fine particulate," says Valentini.



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## Feedback

week. But I work in an office where we have one of your stands, which run out within days of delivery. I hear our patients talking daily about how much they miss the free copy. Our doctors run behind on a daily basis, and while it didn't keep the patients at bay for long, it did indeed help retention there, while supplies lasted! Please bring it back and consider delivering more papers to a currently growing doctor's office in the Burlington area.

Stacy Crosby  
COLCHESTER

## MARNEY'S PLAN WON'T WORK

As a conventional dairy farmer, milking 170 cows, I have been interested in Mr. Marney's *assault* on Vermont's dairy industry for some years. [Dairy Devil's A Dogged Ag Activist Takes Aim at Vermont's "Sacred Cow." January 26.] I would agree with Prof. Erickson that for many farmers, Mr. Marney's attacks are uncomfortable, however, he continues to ignore much of the progress that has been made: new structures to store manure, nutrient management plans to make manure a useful and better sold and crop management plans to reduce runoff. In addition, Mr. Marney's assessment of the economics of both organic and conventional dairy seems to ignore many of the external forces that impact dairy production in our state. There is an surplus of milk in the Northeast, and organic dairy farmers have in hard to time making a go at conventional, economically.

We in agriculture do need to work together to improve environmentally and economically. But, James Marney has not shown either a full understanding of the problem or the flexibility to make progress working with anyone else. His frustration with lack of progress is partly because his plan won't work either economically or environmentally, coupled with [his] inability to work jointly towards a measurable, replicable solution.

John Roberts  
WEST DUNBELL

## QUIZ NOS

Dr. Wayne was on film quite frequently, "Film Quiz Junkie," February 21. C'mon, it's Dr. Wayne!

Alex Neef  
BURLINGTON

## IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO

Your account of efforts by attorney David Singh to obtain records of possible financial improprieties at the Governor's Highway Safety Program raises an important but unaddressed

question arising under the state's Access to Public Records Act [Editor's Note, February 1]. At issue are records the state has withheld on the ground that they concern personnel issues.

You quoted General Counsel Steve Collier of the Department of Human Resources as saying the APRA allows the state to release personal records if "personal privacy interests are outweighed by the public interest" but it isn't necessarily so.

Section 317(c) of the APRA lists "personal documents relating to an individual, including information in any files maintained to hire, evaluate, promote or discipline any employee of a public agency" as among 26 (count 'em) categories of documents that are fully and specifically "excepted from public inspection and copying." Nothing in the statute suggests this is a matter of agency discretion, to my knowledge, the Vermont Supreme Court has never construed the issue head-on.

The balancing test Mr. Collier lays out is a good one because it states -- and the Vermont Supreme Court could decide -- that in compelling circumstances the disclosure exceptions should yield to considerations of public accountability. But that's not what the statute says. The Legislature should swiftly adopt a clarification.

Douglas M. Kreis  
BURLINGTON

Kreis is an assistant professor at Vermont Law School.

## WATT'S THE PROBLEM?

That fence has been burning for years [Whiskey Thugs Fence, "Why does a perpetual gas flame burn near I-89 in Montpelier?"] It's great that some of the methane becomes electricity, but a tremendous amount of energy is wasted. They need more generating capacity, if they can't use all the gas now!

One thing about this article that is annoyingly common in the mainstream media is the propagation of chicanery about power and energy. There is no such thing as 2.3 megawatts a year! Does the plant put out an average of 2.3 megawatts of power over a year's time, which equals 20,448,000 kilowatt hours/year, or does it produce 2.3 megawatt hours (2,880 kWh) per year? Megawatts-per-year is a nonsense term. One can deduce the meaning by parsing the average energy usage per house, but why not be clear and use real terms?

An electric bill charger for units of energy, kWh, power is the rate at which energy is used. These are important distinctions that should be taught in school. Eekwee obfuscation!

Gordon Clark  
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## Capital Crisis? 4/18

Graff says National Life has not taken a position on the matter.

"Our feeling is, the city needs to decide what is a fair tax structure. That's not up to us to decide," he says.

Small-business owners like Kasey say that regardless of whether heavy hitters such as National Life pay the bulk of the new tax, their own profit margins are too small to bear any additional burden.

Already facing competition from online retailers, Kasey worries that shoppers will bypass Montpelier in favor of places like Berlin, where there is a proposed expansion to an existing Walmart that already gives Montpelier plenty of competition.

Kasey also takes issue with the notion that out-of-towners should foot Montpelier's bill.

"I think that's a very dubious argument because, without those people, Montpelier doesn't exist," he says. "We'd just be another lonely, dusty town."

York says the proposed taxes would kill the library in several ways. Because *dining out* charge shows down ticket sales, York passes his tickets at a flat, 50 rate. Rather than raise prices by a buck, York and he would absorb the point-of-sale tax. He would also pay more for the projectors, screens, bulbs and sound equipment he purchases.

"It's a double whammy for us," he says. "For a theater like Savoy which is always on the ropes as it is, it certainly doesn't help. In our case, so in the case of many businesses, we can't just pass it on to the consumer."

After eight years as mayor, Hopper will relinquish the post next month. Former school board chairman John Heller is the sole candidate vying to replace her. He says that local sales

taxes can be gradual if tied to a specific improvement, such as a parking garage, but they should not be imposed simply to pay the bills.

"I think we ought to be able to pay for our core municipal infrastructure needs out of our current property-tax revenue," Heller says.

Where will he find savings? Heller says he's committed to improving the city's roads, bridges and sidewalks, but will take a close look at police and fire services.

Richard Sherr, a computer consultant and former city auditor, says the problem ultimately boils down to Montpelier's inability to cut anything.

"We're living as if we're a town of hundreds of thousands," he says. "It's a case study of Vermont culture. We can't make cuts. We can't psychologically cut what we built, so what we do is we borrow."

One in point: After Gasfian and other concerned residents sent their letter requesting a 1 percent, across-the-board cut, city manager

Fraser came up with a menu of options that could have reduced the budget by as much as 3 percent.

Those included cuts to cultural events, transportation services and public safety. But the city council ultimately rejected many of the cuts and presented a budget that — when factoring in items that were included in last year's budget but which will be voted on separately this year — is up 2.2 percent.

Like Sherr, Kasey thinks Montpelier residents want too much from the city — and, as a result, don't end up with the basics.

"They have big hearts and they typically approve every spending request that comes, and it's affected our ability to keep our infrastructure intact," he says. □

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# VSA Vermont Launches an Engaging, and Accessible, Exhibit

BY PAMELA POLSTON

**A**n exhibition called "Engage" is a "dream I've had for six years," says **JUDITH CHALNER**, the executive director of **VSA VERMONT**. It's talking about coloring, jewelry art show featuring 36 works by 25 artists who have "various disabilities" but more than just a display of artworks, the twofold project is also about bringing access awareness to venues and galleries alike. To Chalner, it's nothing short of "a moment of transformation statewide in terms of accessibility in cultural venues."

Consider the radical notion, for example, that a person with limited sight could enjoy an art show — not to mention make art. "It hasn't been understood how people with visual impairment could be patrons of the arts," Chalner says. "It's an underserved population." That's an understatement. Even for VSA Vermont, whose mission is to put the arts and individuals with a variety of disabilities, a focus on visual impairment is "a new one," she notes.

That focus has enabled exciting training from natural experts in audio

description, as well as in ways to make a gallery exhibit more visually accessible. Something as simple as large-print labels, Chalner points out, is useful to all gallerygoers — people can read them from a distance instead of having

**IT HASN'T BEEN UNDERSTOOD HOW PEOPLE WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT COULD BE PATRONS OF THE ARTS.**

JUDITH CHALNER

to jockey for a close-up position. Larger letters are also easier for those learning to read, or who are new to the English language.

VSA Vermont, with the help of the **VERMONT ARTS COUNCIL**, and its accessibility consultant, **ANNE WELLS**, will provide technical assistance to the cultural venues participating in "Engage"

— three to five galleries "that have physical access at least," says Chalner. The organization will also offer accessibility training to others. "This is growth for us to become a resource for venues

around the state," Chalner says. "The calls are already coming in from galleries — 'How can we train our staff to work with audio?' We're looking to travel the exhibit and pass along those skills."



Engage by Judith Chalner

## Gold Diggers

Fans of 19th-century comedy look out. The University of Vermont Theatre Department is stepping back on time with a production of **THE MARRIED WOMAN** opening this week.

Originally written by Irish playwright George Farquhar, the play debuted in London in 1704. It had staying power — 230 years later the American playwright Thornton Wilder began adapting the work for 20th-century audiences but never finished. Finally, in the early 2000s contemporary writer Ken Ludwig took a stab at the freshened-up play, debuting in 2006.

Why bother adapting such an old comedy? **BRIAN CARLTON**, who is directing the UVM production, says restoration comedies "reflected the social customs of the time. They make fun of politics and the social mores of the time." So it's easy for references to get lost on modern audiences. "This one is written as your average college student can understand it. It's fresh. It's funny. It's engaging," she says.

Like almost soap-opera **RENEWALS**, the plot is deliciously complicated. It's centered around a pair of misfits — an idiot and a braggart — men who embark on a hunt for wealthy wives when they plan to wed and then abandon, taking their money with them. "What if they

seek is fortune and what they get is love in the end?" says Carlton.

There's a dark side to the comedy, she adds. In *Farquhar* wrote the play, he was laughing at an unhappy marriage. Right after marrying his wife, whom he had believed to be wealthy, he discovered she was actually an unscrupulous arms. "He spent the last years of his life as an unhappy marriage paying off her debts," says Carlton.

And why select this refurbished old play for student actors?

"We live in such uncertain times. There's so much going on in the world that's so awful. This play is funny," Carlton explains. "I think we need to laugh, we need our spirits lifted."

Oh, and there are swords. And corsets. And a heartwarming conclusion. "This play clearly says you need to find happiness within," the director concludes. "and be true to yourself." ☐

MEGAN JAMES

The *Beauvoir Strangers* directed by Brian Carlton at Royal Tyler Theatre UVM in Burlington, February 14 through 18 and 25 through 26 at 7:30 p.m. February 19 and 26 at 2 p.m. ST 18, info: 855-2084, uvmtheatre.org



The *Beauvoir Strangers* in rehearsal

The nonprofit also partnered with **BURLINGTON CITY ARTS** and the **PLYM CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS** to bring about "Engage." The Plym's executive director, **JOHN KELLEY**, was a member of the jury, and the show will open at that venue's **AMY E. HARRAWAY GALLERY** later this month. The other jurors were **NICKY NYE**, director of the **BRUSH HERMEL GALLERY** in Jeffersonville; and **JANE VAN FLEET** of Cabot, and Greenboro-based artist **PAUL CHALKER**, who also curated the exhibit.

Chalker says the jurors "did not discuss disability"; they just considered the merits of the art, which was presented in a range of two-dimensional mediums. "There are artists who have been working for a long time, and others are brand new," he says. "All are thrilled in the opportunity." The process, Chalker adds, "has concerned us with artists we didn't know before."

For his part, Chalker says working on "Engage" has been "a wonderful learning experience, getting to know what the challenges are for the artists

every day." From its electronic call to artists through assistance in finding the artworks, the project has "given them an opportunity to be in an exhibition — in some cases for the first time — and also to be able to take themselves seriously as artists."

For the art-viewing public, too, "Engage" is likely to offer a novel experience: braving the work of artists with disabilities "in the face of our cultural life in Vermont," says Chalker, and increasing awareness of how individuals with physical, developmental, psychiatric or visual challenges negotiate a world the rest of us take for granted. ☐

**E** "Engage" opens with a reception at the Flynn Center's Amy E. Harraway Gallery in Burlington on Sunday February 26, 4-6 p.m. The exhibit remains on view through April 29, and then will travel to other venues around the state. [www.engageart.org](http://www.engageart.org)

## Quick Lit

One of the good things about independent publishing is that it gives us a window into the life stories of fascinating members of our community whether or not those stories are commercial. And **CAROL RAPER**, an octogenarian Burlington resident, certainly has a story. Raised in Pittsburgh, PA, and inspired by the teasing of five older brothers, she was enthralled by science since the third grade. In those days a woman pursuing graduate study in that field was a rarity. But at the University of Chicago in the 1940s, the author found her mentor — and future husband — **Red Raper**, a young professor who was studying the bizarre sex habits of water minks.

Thus began Caroly Raper's long career of observing how fungi pair up and get it on — research that eventually took its place at the forefront of molecular genetics. After her husband's death she ran her own lab at Harvard, then at the University of Vermont until 2004.

Raper chronicles all that in **LOVE, SEX AND MUSHROOMS: ADVENTURES OF A WOMAN IN SCIENCE**, a memoir that sometimes feels more like a collection of anecdotes. She doesn't always

succeed at making her research comprehensible to the layperson, but the glee with which she describes fungus sex changes is infectious. Her observations of human behavior are entertaining, too, whether she's recalling the boorishness of genetics pioneer James Watson at a Harvard party or her own struggles to get students interested.

Raper's candid descriptions give younger readers a picture of mid-century life they won't get from "Mad Men." While she did leave the lab in the 50s to raise two kids and play suburban faculty wife, for instance, the author and her friends spent their spare time as activists for better schools, not banned Betty Drapers. We learn too the details of procuring an illegal abortion and getting a background check from the FBI during the Red Scare. And Raper describes, touchingly, how sharing a lab always brought her and her husband closer.

All in all, this lucidly written book leaves us with the impression of a life well lived — with the occasional irony. ☐

**MARGOT HARRISON**

**Love, Sex and Mushrooms: Adventures of a Woman in Science** by Caroly Raper. 270 pages with illustrations. \$18.95 (trade paperback) or \$9.95 (e-book). [carolyraper.com](http://carolyraper.com)

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# Ballet Legend Suzanne Farrell Passes on the Balanchine Legacy

BY MEGAN JAMES

**S**uzanne Farrell is considered one of the most influential ballet dancers of the 20th century. In the early 1960s, the whip-like teenager from Ohio joined the New York City Ballet and became the muse of George Balanchine, regarded as the greatest choreographer in contemporary ballet.

On stage, Farrell was known for her cockless, almost off-kilter dancing and the vulnerability she exuded. In a 2009 *New Yorker* essay, Joan Acemich writes, "From when her dancing was slow, it was wild, pining,

feeding. In time, she affected every American company H. In today's American ballet dancers inevitably had long — fast — down, rickshaws — that is due in part to Farrell. And it, when they are so profound, they are performed in a cool, muted, uncanny way that, you realize, measure is Farrell speaking or Farrell and Balanchine."

Just over a decade ago, Farrell took the helm of an educational program at Washington, DC's Kennedy Center that quickly evolved into her own dance company, the Suzanne Farrell Ballet. Now 66, she has dedicated this phase of her life to preserving the works of her mentor, Balanchine, who died in 1983.

Farrell responded via email to questions *Seven Days* posed in advance of her company's performance at the Plaza.

## DANCE

**SEVEN DAYS:** What's it like to work with young dancers taking on the roles you once danced?

**SUZANNE FARRELL:** I give my dancers all the tools they need to successfully dance a role, but I don't want them to be carbon copies of me. [Laughs] We are not machines where the volume can be turned up. We have to do it all visually and energetically. We use our own technology, our own instruments.

**SD:** How do you differ as a leader from Balanchine? How are you similar?

**SF:** Good dancer should sleep and people carry feeling through. Everybody I met in the audience during that wonderful era when Balanchine was working, and everything seemed so right with the world, and how their lives had changed, no matter what walk of life they came from. I want to bring that same sense of urgency and importance to the ones we're bringing.

**SD:** When did you realize you had truly made it as a ballet dancer?

**SF:** After studying ballet for many years, people forget what it's like to feel. Many dancers begin to feel noble simply because they come to class at 10. They should have this wonderful feeling unlike anything else in life: the state of holistic peace. I came my 40 dancers and students take not to focus on being a star, but to remember the stars they had in their eyes that made them want to dance in the first place.

As you become experienced and perfect the technique, you have to remain vulnerable and not lose that wonderful innocence, that innocence.

I enjoyed all the opportunities to perform in many wonderful roles. Whenever people ask what my favorite role is, I say, "Like one I am currently working on." I would like to be in every different "world" setting,

**SD:** You've described the process of developing the dances Balanchine created for you as "whopping up this dust, and after hours and days, it becomes a ballet." Were you aware in those moments that you were making history?

**SF:** When Mr. Balanchine was working on ballet for me, there would be no one in the room except Gordon Solender at the piano, George and myself. He would show me a little something and I would try to imitate or shape or decide what he indicated.

Choreography is not born in choreography; it grows out of a suggestion and then it gets shaped into choreography. It truly would be my "That's not what I wanted." Our collaboration was very special and filled with trust. He would put the ball in my court and allow me to run with it. Sometimes he would have a mistake become part of the choreography — not that every mistake can be put to music and become beautiful, but he made me see the difficulty.

**1** The Suzanne Farrell Ballet performs at the Plaza Garden for the Performing Arts in Washington on Friday, February 26, at 8 p.m. \$20-\$22. Info: 800-888-8888, [sfballet.org](http://sfballet.org).

This is all part of my personal history, and I know these were significant ballets, but I was trying to be the innocent (they trying to improve) and never thinking of history.

**SD:** You are considered one of America's greatest ballet dancers, but you're best known for being Balanchine's muse. What does it feel like to have your artistic legacy tied to someone else's?

**SF:** Every time I stage one of Balanchine's ballets, I see something different. I'm constantly discovering another facet of his genius. Though he was a brilliant man, Balanchine never said like he knew everything about everything. He was a very good listener. It was that kind of connection — with his dancers, with the music and with himself — that made working with him so extraordinary. At the same time, he would say to me, "It's your stage" — not him.

**SD:** Why does the world still need ballet?

**SF:** Ballet is unique because [it] gives women a sense of the music's symmetry and integrity of its creative. Before videos/DVDs, it was passed on by the people who first danced it. They had firsthand knowledge. Not just of the steps but of the history. That fragile moment gets lost and is not easily replaced. Dance has to be re-created by music, not to change or something else. This is why I believe Mr. Balanchine's beliefs are important — they remind us of the importance of being like that fragile moment. ☐

Members of Farrell's company





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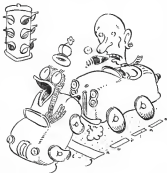
Dear Cecil,  
I heard about a soldier who had been a spatter in helicopter patrols because being colorblind he could not pick out camouflage from background. Foreign news story. I thought I remember reading a book a study looking colorblindness in animals to select pressure. Is there an evolutionary advantage to being colorblind?

Look, use the Straight Dope Message Board

**T**his may seem counterintuitive, but the answer, scientists, is yes.

Let's put this squarely: The case can be made that acute color vision is a primitive trait that tends to disappear as organisms and societies become more advanced. In fact, we've already lost acute color vision once in our evolutionary history, then got a version of it back later. If you're the last guy you can expect that color vision is as obsolete as progress, and that in the perfect world of the future, we'll see everything in black and white.

OK, I'm exaggerating, but you can't deny the idea out of hand. Let's start with the claim that colorblind soldiers are better at seeing through camouflage. This claim has been lodged around as military and scientific circles since at least 1946, but despite the obvious absurdity of such a claim for a long time it's never bothered doing any formal



investigation other than one unpublished study actually indicating there was nothing to it.

More recent research, however, suggests maybe there is.

In a study published in 1992, scientists flashed a pattern on a video monitor, a 20-by-30 grid of small rectangles, all of them oriented vertically except within a randomly located 7-by-7 target area where the rectangles were horizontal. Test participants were asked to guess one of four humans to indicate what quadrant of the screen the target area had appeared in. Some test

participants had normal color vision, while others, so-called dichromats (I'll explain below), had severe color blindness, rendering them incapable of distinguishing red from green.

In the first trial, all the rectangles were the same color, and participants in both groups had little difficulty spotting the target. In the next trial, the rectangles were randomly colored red or green. This time around, those with normal color vision did poorly—all they saw in the brief time the pattern appeared (in 1/10th of a second) was a jumble of red and green.

The dichromats, on the other hand, Richard here. Without color to distract them, they spotted

the target so easily as with a monochrome pattern. The same held true when each target rectangle was replaced with a capital A while the background rectangles were replaced with Bs. Despite this conspicuous difference, randomly coloring the letters red or green completely floored those with normal color vision. The dichromats, on the other hand, were unsurprised, picking out the target as effortlessly as before.

But that only happened when the colors were red and green. When the colors were red and blue, which looked different to the dichromats, they were just as confused as those with normal color vision.

Admittedly it's a long leap from a lab experiment to the battlefield, and an even bigger one to say human color vision is evolving into a less sophisticated state. But consider:

- About 6 percent of males have some form of colorblindness. Sure, we can find useful analogies for defective color rather than letting them die on the battlefield. However, one researcher claims, if percent is more than that can be explained by random variation, the speculation colorblindness may offer a positive reproductive advantage.
- One UK study found that

colorblindness was most common in the subtropical southeastern part of the country, which had been repeatedly overrun by invaders. It was much less so in the more rural north and west, where the inhabitants were more likely to have descended from that area's original primitive tribes.

• We mammals have much less elaborate color vision than many species below us on the food chain. Most birds and fish are tetrachromats, meaning their retinas have color receptors, or cones, specializing in four different hues, enabling them to see colors in the ultraviolet as up available to us. Mammals presently are dichromats, with only two types of cone and thus crude color vision. It's thought that's because most mammals are nocturnal, where the advantage is in having more rods; your retina, providing better night vision and color vision be damned.

Even today most primates are dichromats. Only a few species including humans are trichromats, with three types of cone, as it's thought to have evolved when our ancestors took to foraging in daylight and better color vision improved their ability to find fruit.

Today if you want fruit you go to go to the Safeway. Does that mean our color vision will again deteriorate, or will the need to distinguish colors to avoid our deadly weeds at night again stem the monochromatic tide? Give it a few thousand years and we'll find out.

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**T**here it sits in the parking lot at the corner of Burlington's Main Street and South Wisconsin Avenue: a tall blue shed topped with various devices, some resembling the *Wind of O's* anemometers in hats. No signs explain its provenance or purpose. I circled it a few times, looking for explanations by going around with camera and notepad in ways that would have gone unnoticed by the Department of Homeland Security in more personnel cases.

Then I tried the direct approach. The place has a door and a window, so one day, I parked the back of a head inside, I poked my nose and knuckles. Twice. No answer. I considered tapping on the window but refrained out of shyness. The sight of my grinning face in the baldness and black bicycle helmet has caused brave people to nod.

Following a tip from the Department of Public Works, I called the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation at its Waterfield office. Amy Sheddick, a lab technician there, gave me the lowdown on the shed. It's an air-quality monitoring station that the DEC calls its Burlington Trailer (another station stands on the roof of the John J. Zangheri State Office Building on Pearl Street), and it's been there since 2000. Vermont has several other such stations, each quietly testing the air, minute by minute, day after day, for such things as carbon monoxide, particulate pollution and volatile organic compounds. If a forest fire or a distant volcano eruption or just a sudden jump in pollution occurred, the instruments on this shed would be our eyes and ears in the air. Sheddick and her colleagues watch as the information flows in.

"If you go near water works, you'll be able to see our real-time data," said Sheddick,



## WHISKEY TANGO FOXTROT

*We just had to ask...*

**What's that weird shack in the Superblock parking lot?**

BY JENNY CLARK

"We have local air-quality forecasts and then the air-quality index, which shows if there are elevations in particulates and ozone."

The machine-like figures, labeled "Wedding & Associates, Inc.," first out to be instruments that gather

particulates by catching them on filters. But, Sheddick explained, the DEC hasn't used them since its lab in Waterbury, which analyzed the Wedding filters, was flooded last year. Newer instruments at the Zangheri station are currently measuring particulates, and the old ones will probably be removed this summer, creating a sizable silhouette in the Burlington skyline.

From Internet evidence, Wedding & Associates, Inc. appears to be inactive, dusting the machines to go the way of so many elegant but elderly scientific instruments.

Should Burlington residents check the online monitoring data before venturing to breathe the air outside? Sheddick said the DEC seldom sees jumps in pollution — "not in Burlington." If there's a marker there that's filling up the gas station (across the street), then we usually see a spike. It's usually really early in the morning. The substances spiking are benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene, a smelly brew of volatile organic compounds that run into the air from petroleum products and can enter soil and water supplies.

Not to be self-righteous — OK, maybe I am, we cyclists can be insufferable. But it's worth pointing out that most of what the DEC measures comes from internal combustion engines. Vermonters have been driving more with each decade. Back about 1 billion vehicle miles per year in 1980 to more than six times that at the millennium. And, as the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources notes on its website, "For every 10 gallons of gasoline you put in the tank, 2 gallons (do the) work, and 8 gallons go out as heat and exhaust."

The Superblock station is one of the places where such records are kept. From the increased pollution readings, said Sheddick, the DEC can tell when a

car idling beside the trailer (Also worth bearing in mind: the 3.3 billion pounds of carbon dioxide that Vermont cars emit each year, a substance not measured by these sensors.)

I asked Sheddick about the person in the station's window and why she hadn't answered the door. "There's probably a lot of wires that knock," I suggested helpfully.

"Well, that and you can't hear, actually," said Sheddick, who said the head belonged to one of her co-workers. "All the noise and groups are going. It's very loud in there — that's probably why she didn't answer."

You'd never know it from outside. The station doesn't rattle or much noise, due to its construction from "vacuum epoxy laminated shelter panels, using aluminum or fiberglass honeycomb separated by structural foam," according to Elko Manufacturing Corp., the shed's maker. The company has an old 90s-era website that also explains the design's military provenance. "[T]he supplied skills and lightweight down ramps facilitate handling by forklift, crane and conveyer or winched aircraft." Cool.

The good news is that Burlington's levels of carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and particulates have long been below national standards, thanks in part to catalytic converters and other emissions controls. But the readings aren't at zero, otherwise Sheddick and her colleagues wouldn't have jobs. From long-persisting particles to any number of gritty, hydrocarbon substances such as ethyl-tert-butyl ether, we all breathe in these things, including off-righteous cyclists. ☐

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# Speaking in Tongues

BY JOHNNY BLAIR



respect, there's love, there's friendship, and also sometimes disagreements.

## SD: Disagreements?

HHY: Many of them are *discrete*, and I'm really busy about schooling. The sociological question is that, when you try to tell [people] things like, "Go to school, you need to be educated, you need to get a better job," you're in a sense changing someone's way of life. They lived in the forest, and they're like, *loshomea* is streams or cow corridors, and they just lived their daily life freely and happily, a simple life. Then you start trying to direct them this way, that way, it's like, *industrialized* lifestyle, and I don't know if I should do this. Sometimes it's like, Stop.

*After Htar Htar just slow down.*

## SD: What kind of factors make your job difficult?

HHY: It makes it harder many times when the systems are not connecting. [On the day of an appointment] the patient's supposed to call the Quick Call [for a ride via the Special Services Transportation Agency]. But the patient speaks zero English. If I forget [to call on his behalf], everything's screwed. So these little things in between systems, there isn't any connection. Practically, say, it's not any job. It's not that it's difficult job, either. It's the patient's job, but someone has to pick up the job. It happens all the time.

## SD: It's as if you are serving as the glue that holds all the pieces together.

HHY: We know we have to take our responsibility, but also other institutions must, too. Because it's the federal government who decides America will [accept immigrants]. Even though there's a lot of controversy, I guess it's American heart that they want to help refugees, and a lot of people have picked up pieces. So we do our part. ☺

**A**s the daughter of opposition political leaders in Burma, Htar Htar Yu (pronounced "ta-ta-yu") saw combat long before she ever saw a school, a hospital or a shop. Now she helps new Americans navigate those kinds of institutions as a staff interpreter with the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program.

Yu, 28, spent her first eight years in the jungles of Burma, where her father was battling the reigning military regime. In 1991, the family fled to a refugee camp on the Thai-Burmes border. After attending a George Soros-funded school in Thailand, Yu became an intern for the Burmese exile government. Through Youth for Understanding, she spent a year as an exchange student at Sparkling High School in Burr Ridge, Ill. at Middlebury College, she majored in sociology and anthropology with a minor in gender studies. Yu graduated in 2006 and now lives in Essex, interpreting in Burmese, Thai and Mon at immigrants' appointments, jobs and court dates.

At the end of a busy day last week, Yu told *Buzz* she'd been told the students were "very cheery" needs don't get lost in translation.

**SERVING BUZZ:** For what kinds of reasons do people call an interpreter?

HHY: HHY: Htar Yu. They have [to translate] restaurants. Say someone's hired and then, first day, they don't know how to use a washing machine or where to put things. They're directly from refugee camps, and they grew up in jungles, they don't know the machine system here. [On an immigrant's first day at a farm job, I am] explaining what kind of vegetables are used, what chemicals are not to be touched without gloves, when to take a break, when not to take a break.

And then courts—domestic violence, DUI. Emergency [visit] at the hospital, especially with kids—they get very sick and get a hold of me breathing. Oh, car insurance—that's a disaster; it was a thing that I don't want to interpret, but I get to do it all the time.

I get to interpret actually a lot of births, too—it's been nice in total, so it's amazing to see. I'm just telling them, "Push, push, push, push!" I was very tired for myself, I'm not doing anything, but I was so tired! It's amazing to see how life begins.

**SD: Are there any quirks of the Burmese language that make certain misunderstandings funny and inevitable?**

HHY: There's one—"cheese" in Burmese means "poop." "Lee," like the last name Lee, in "poor" in Burmese

[laughs]. There's quite a few.

## SD: You must do both linguistic and cultural interpretation. Can you mention some examples?

HHY: In terms of time, Americans are very precise, but the Burmese are more like *laid-back* people, they think that missing an appointment or not putting in the appointment on time is fine. So sometimes I have to explain that, since we, you have to be very precise.

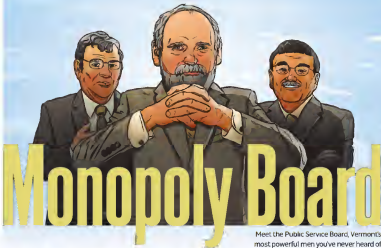
And also, in general, the Burmese are very *relax* people. If we're going to do something, then [we] gather together and then do it somewhere around the house. American culture is, your house is where you sleep and be comfortable, to make friends, to get involved, to do things, you have to go out of the house and reach out. Burmese don't really do that.

## SD: Does being an interpreter give you any kind of special position in the Burmese community?

HHY: I am very careful, being an anthropologist and sociologist, just understand how my presence might affect them. I always make sure that I am not showing off, I'm not taking a high position but they do know that I'm educated, and if they want something they always come to me. I use a lot of flow from them toward me, so I love them a lot. There's

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Meet the Public Service Board, Vermont's most powerful men you've never heard of  
By Ken Picard

Conservation hearings don't usually draw a crowd — not in Vermont, anyway. But reporters and TV crews filled every seat in the Senate Finance Committee room late last month to get a look at John Vele, chair of the Vermont Public Service Board, who's up for another year term. All were there to glean some revealing info about the reins of the house.

As the white-bearded and bespectacled Vele surveyed the witness chair, Sen. Ann Cummings checked and rechecked about the large media presence, the ardent attention of utility regulation don't exactly make for idyllic television.

But this is no ordinary year for Vermont's utilities. In the next few months, chairman Vele, and fellow PSB members David Coen and John Burke are expected to rule on some of Vermont's biggest and most contentious issues. The repercussions of their decisions will be felt for years, even decades.

These cases, or "docket," include the proposed merger of the state's two largest electric utilities, Green Mountain Power

and Central Vermont Public Service. Also on the agenda is the fate of controversial Burlington Telecom, as well as the Deerfield industrial wind project near Rutland. More recently, some legislators are saying the state should control the Vermont Electric Power Company, which owns and operates Vermont's major transmission lines. A VEECO deal, too, would be subject to PSB approval.

But the 600-pound gorilla in the committee room with Vele was Vermont Justice. On January 18, a federal district court judge struck down Act 360, which required that the legislature approve the nuclear plant's 30-year license extension. Ratings, the plant's owner, has now asked the PSB to green-light Vermont Yankee's continued operation beyond March 25, when its current license expires. That docket has been on hold since 2008, pending the outcome of the federal lawsuit.

Now the PSB will rule on this and other contentious matters before it is the subject of endless speculation. Most longtime observers and participants in utility

regulatory cases interviewed for this story agreed that this board is among the least scrutinized or predictable in years. But trying to guess which way it will rule requires some understanding of what the PSB is, what it does, who serves on it and how its role has changed over the years.

If you've seen coverage of the PSB, you've left you wondering: What the hell is the Public Service Board? you've not done. But it's worth noting that its decisions affect so many Vermonters as those made by the governor, legislature and Supreme Court. Vele, Coen and Burke may be the most powerful men in the state about whom most Vermonters know virtually nothing.

## PSB, DPS — WTF?

Not to be confused with the Vermont Department of Public Service, which is a policy arm of the governor, the PSB is a quasi-judicial body of state government that regulates electric power, telephone and internet service, cable television, pipeline gas and some private water

systems. Its roots date back to 1858, when the legislature created a railroad commission to ensure the railroads were safe and charging fair rates. The board later expanded to three members, and in 1961, was granted jurisdiction over all the state's "natural monopolies," including gas, electric, telephone and water/gas companies. The 1964 law also marks the first time that the term "public good" appears in Vermont statute.

Today, the board consists of a full-time chairman and two part-time board members who are vetted by the state's judicial nominating board appointed by the governor and confirmed by the legislature. In staggered, six-year terms. Their staff of 25 consists of attorneys, engineers and economists.

Like judges, PSB members are expected to remain as scrupulously free from party politics and, especially in contested dockets, from their colleagues in the DPS. That said, there's an unwritten rule that whichever political party occupies the governor's office reserves one of the three

ists for the minority party. Vols, who was first appointed in 2005 by Republican governor Jim Douglas, was reappointed by Gov. Peter Shumlin, a Democrat. Burke, a Rutland native and Cantonese lawyer, was appointed in 2003 by Democrat governor Howard Dean, then reappointed by Douglas. Most longtime PSB observers say it's very difficult to discern party politics in the board's rulings.

The PSB can make or break a utility by granting or withholding what's called a certificate of public good — CPD. For example, in the mid 2000s, VELCO wanted to build new, higher-capacity transmission lines across the state. First, VELCO had to go before the PSB and convince the board that the Northeast Reliability Project was essential to meet the growing demand for power in the northeast corner of Vermont. At the time, VELCO argued that if the project wasn't approved, the city of Burlington could go dark on peak-load summer days.

VELCO prevailed and the board issued a CPD, but it included conditions and restrictions to meet the concerns of diverse municipalities and individual property owners along the route, many of whom felt blindsided by the project and its huge cost. One of that docket was VELCO's promise to plant and maintain more than 30,000 trees "for the life of the project" — which could keep them in the after-care business for more than 75 years. The CPD also gave rise to the Vermont System Planning Committee,

a group of utility and consumer reps charged with better understanding future transmission needs.

"By and large, we are well served by our Public Service Board process," suggests Barbara Gomes, general manager of the Burlington Electric Department and a member of the VELCO board. "The demands that come with getting a certificate of public good in Vermont are more costly and time consuming, I believe, than in any other state in New England."

### "Public Process"

How does the PSB arrive at the public good? It conducts its business like a court of law, with evidentiary hearings, court reporters, document discovery, attorneys and sworn witnesses. Oddly, the governor's DPS, usually referred to as "the department," represents the public interest in the proceedings.

To participate, citizens are either admitted as formal parties to the proceeding or notified informally at public hearings. Often, those hearings are held in the communities directly affected by the project.

Today, Section 248 of Vermont statute spells out 30 criteria that must be weighed in determining the public good. They include environmental, aesthetic and historical concerns, the overall need for a project and its potential economic costs and benefits.

One Vermont utility executive summarized up more accurately: "The public good, he says, is "this panoply that isn't easily defined, but you know it when you see it."

**IF I COULD PREDICT WHAT THE  
PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD WAS  
GOING TO DO EACH TIME,  
I'D BE IN VEGAS,  
NOT HERE.**

**BARBARA GOMES,  
GENERAL MANAGER,  
BURLINGTON ELECTRIC  
DEPARTMENT**

If senators and journalists at Vols's confirmation hearing were hoping to get a sense of how he might interpret the public good — regarding Vermont Yankee or other cases — they were surely disappointed. Vols, in stonewall with 37 years of experience as a legislator including the last seven as PSB chair, was poker faced as they came. No amount of legislative quibbling would convince him to show his hand.

Sen. Randy Brock (R-Franklin) acknowledged as much as he tried to rattle Vols.

"I have a lot of questions, but I know you probably can't answer them," Brock said. "How would you improve [section] 248?" — the Vermont statute that gives the PSB its authority to approve utility projects — "to make it more efficient and faster while at the same time maintaining the same level of environmental protection?"

"That would be very difficult," Vols replied tentatively.

In three sentences from the policy perspective, Brock pressed, "that you would recommend to us that might clarify the requirements or improve the materials provided?"

"I'd have to think about that some more... but off the top of my head, there's no way around," Vols replied.

After several minutes of back-and-forth about searchable-energy credits, Brock asked Vols if he's troubled by the "concentration of power" in Vermont's electricity industry.

Vols immediately began answering the question, explaining that whatever he did would seem to relate directly to the pending GMP/CPVS merger. Vols's sidelong-avoided diplomats, not voters.

Next, Sen. Tim Ashe (D-F-Champlain) asked Vols how he strikes "the right balance" between accessible power and aesthetic concerns. Ashe was

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## Monopoly Board

stating to the PSB's controversial decision last year to permit GMP to build 25 industrial wind turbines atop Lowell Mountain – one of four red-tailed wind projects the PSB has approved in recent years.

"Basically, I think that's something the legislature has to sort out," Volk answered. "Right now, the guidance we have is to promote renewable energy. And we are our sitting statutes on a case-by-case basis to decide if any project meets those requirements, including aesthetics and other environmental impacts. As long as they do, they'll be approved."

Thus Volk added, "It's some point, if the people of Vermont, as represented by the legislature, look around and say, 'We don't like the way this looks anymore, we would like to do that. We would have to listen to that.'"

Volk's last remark was the closest thing yet to a summation of this judicial philosophy: We do exactly what the legislature asks and the law allows, nothing more.

"I'm not an activist," Volk clarified later in a rare interview. (Usually, PSB members file judges' decisions to speak to the press.) "I find that the legal team and governor's job to set policy, my job, and the board's job, is to implement those statutes fairly and objectively."

you're set up for a bad judgment, so matter which way it goes?"

But how effectively the PSB weighs conflicting evidence and testimony is a frequent bone of contention. Sandra Levine is a Concord-based law foundation attorney with many years of experience on utility matters. She suggests that although the board tries to "strike a balance" between competing interests, it often relies heavily on the recommendations of DPS.

IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS,  
 CHAIRMAN VOLZ, AND FELLOW  
 PSB MEMBERS DAVID COEN  
 AND JOHN BURKE,  
 ARE EXPECTED TO  
 RULE ON SOME OF  
 VERMONT'S  
 BIGGEST AND MOST  
 CONTENTIOUS  
 ISSUES.



## Fair and Balanced?

Most utility executives, lawmakers, attorneys and activists interviewed for this story concur with Volk's self-assessment. Even those who have frequently disagreed with the PSB's rulings concede that Volk is a very experienced adjudicator, tough but fair. And that makes it even harder to predict how the board will rule in a given case.

Bob Stennard is a lobbyist for the Vermont Citizens Action Network, a group that opposes the state plan's reforming. "Whether I would agree with any decision of his, I wouldn't dissent from my respect for him," Stennard says of Volk. "He's a real guy and tries to do the right thing."

Ray Shadish, technical adviser for the statewide New England Coalition, agrees Shadish admits his client has often been on the losing end of PSB orders. Nevertheless, he says this board generally gives his client a fair hearing.

"My impression of Volk on the bench at the Public Service Board is of strict judicial interpretation and impartiality. Not the way I like it, I like to use my own skills. But the way it is, it's one standard for a good judge is that they are impartial. If you can tell which way the judge is leaning,

"I think industry carries a lot of weight," Levine says. "So, when you have a department that's industry friendly, you tend to get decisions from the board that are industry friendly."

Mich Sedano, who served as DPS commissioner under governor Howard Dean from 2003 to 2007, has some historical perspective on that. He notes the relationship between the board and department, which were separated back in 1983, has ebbed and flowed over the years, depending upon how the commissioner and the PSB chair feel about each other. Sedano says his "never saw a governor lean on the PSB as a case" in order to get their way.

"This board is very thoughtful and appears to have a close connection," Sedano adds. "They are active questioners as hearings and... are prepared to be active when the circumstances call for it."

Not apologetic enough for Rob Pflanzheim? A corporate in Sutton, he was "very involved" in the public process surrounding the siting of wind turbines in Sheffield, Dorset and Lowell. He alleges the PSB "cherry-picks the facts" and is

just there to "make sure" whatever the utilities want.

"Quite judicial?" They sit up after the judges but don't deserve to be respected," Pflanzheim complains. "I think they're partisan but arrogant and barely tolerate individuals like me who are opposed to these projects, and they ignore every bit of evidence we bring to them."

Sen. Victor Eliason (R-Rose) (Eliason) agrees with Pflanzheim's perception that projects such as Lowell Mountain and the Northeast Reliability Project had "prejudicial" outcomes.

On the latter, Eliason suggested that other alternatives should have been considered before VERCED "used its power of eminent domain to force this high-voltage power line through some of the most pristine reaches of the state."

The PSB never denies, Eliason complains, "it set up to approve projects, and any attempt to change that is met with force and well-funded opposition in the legislature."

To be fair, Eliason doesn't suggest that is the fault of Volk, Coen or Burke – all of whom, he emphasizes, he would vote to reelect. As he puts it, "It's a systemic problem, not an individual problem." In fact, Eliason endorses the idea of electing PSB members rather than appointing them, as many other states do. He advocates additional changes to do as fair a deal as possible.

The Vermont Senate is expected soon to reconsider Volk some time this week.

## Whose Side Are They On?

Pflanzheim's and Eliason's opinions of the PSB appear to be radically open. Nevertheless, opponents did mount a spirited charge in Volk's otherwise unremarkable confirmation process last week. On February 2 Vermonters for a Clean Environment, a group opposed to the Lowellwind project, passed a letter to the Senate Finance Committee condemning Volk's handling of that case.

In it, Anneette Smith, VCE's executive director, wrote that "Under Volk's leadership the PSB has ignored public input and lost the public's trust – and as a result, his confirmation should be rejected or at least more seriously questioned."

Smith took issue with how the PSB weighed expert testimony on turbine noise and setbacks from neighbors' property lines. Procedurally, Smith complained that the PSB in review of the Lowell project "broke all process for speed, to the extent that due process was thrown out the window."

On the latter point, VCE's letter quoted from PSB member Burke's dissenting opinion. In it, Burke wrote, "I understood that some constraints exist in the matter and the effect delay could have on the





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# Meet the Neighbors

A 125-year-old Burlington club keeps the art of play reading alive

BY MEGAN JAMES



Miss Moore, George (top row), Emily (bottom) and John (bottom) 1950s

In the late 1800s, reading a full play aloud was a civilized way to pass a winter evening. But for a group of families who lived in Burlington's Hill Section at the time — many affiliated with the University of Vermont — it was also a way of life. They would gather in each other's homes every week throughout the coldest months to bring plays to life. They called themselves the Neighbors.

Back then, meetings would last all night and were formal affairs, complete with dinner, drinks, conversation and (in

later decades) evening wear. Members would receive a script on their way in — only the hosts knew the night's play in advance — and gather in the parlor to listen to a story unfold.

More than 125 years later, the Neighbors are still going strong — with many of the same traditions. Those days, the group meets five or six times a year in the parlor of Burlington's First Unitarian Universalist Society. A seasonal invitation is sent out before every meeting, the chosen play and the readers still kept a mystery. As recently as five

years ago, it was de rigueur for the men to wear tuxedos, the women floor-length gowns. Some still do.

In his tux at the Neighbors' most recent meeting, John Smith, 58, has the elegant, slender look of Abraham Lincoln. The suit belonged to his father, who used to wear it to Neighbors gatherings. Smith can trace his Neighbors lineage even further back: Both of his paternal great-grandparents — one of them C.J. Smith, the Burlington business owner, state legislator and namesake of a local elementary school — were members.

When John South was a boy, his parents would invite several other Neighbors to their home for dinner before the meetings. He and his siblings remember peering down from the staircase at "all these people in fancy dress, chattering away," he says.

Smith and Doug Montgomery, another pseudo-clad Neighbor, are both reading taught. They clutch their scripts as 30-odd other members mingle and take their seats.

The Neighbors are a dignified — and, yes, older — bunch. Jennie Keller and Colleen Montgomery, both about 60, are some of the group's spring churchers. So it's not surprising the evening also begins with a brief memorial for members or friends who have recently died. The Neighbors sit for a moment of silence, and then the play begins.

Early Gennet, who produced the night's first reading, stands up to make the big reveal: "Romanus," a one-act play by Alexander Dumas. Then, as she introduces the reading, they take their seats before the audience. John Ives will play Franz Wolf, a "hard, taut and unswerving" philosophy professor; Doug Montgomery will read the appropriately named astronomer Gelsius; a confirmed bachelor and dedicated scientist; Elizabeth Barrett is his "intuitive and personable" sister, Maria; and John South will portray the "officious, overbearing" Mayor Eichenhausen.

"Typesetting" someone is the audience shouts, and the whole room erupts in laughter.

Dumas, best known for *The Count of Monte Cristo*, penned it as a one-act "after he returned the train from Paris," Gennet offers, noting that the comedy wasn't translated into English until 1979. So maybe it's not his greatest work, but it has some measurable one-liners, such as "Marriage is like a besieged fortress. Those on the outside want to get in, those on the inside want to get out."

The readers are eloquent and stammered — some even employing small props — but, for the most part,

they remain seated. Most aren't actors; they simply appreciate theater, and, as member Gen Amari puts it, "We enjoy acting out."

A committee meets twice a year to select plays and assign producers and readers. Even though they're not staged, readings can be a lot of work to produce. Nowadays, Neighbors meetings last only two hours, so plays must be abridged to fit the time frame. Gennet has adapted Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, and Keller once spent nearly three weeks poring down Eugene Ionesco's *Exit the King*. "It's a real challenge," she says of the process, "but you get to know the play really well."

The producer also decides which stage directions to read aloud and which sound effects to include — in "Romanus," Gennet scratched up her face to let out a near-perfect baby cry.

Costumes are always encouraged. The five women who read during the second half of the recent meeting — a comedy called "Fuzari's Tea" about a gaggle of English ladies who gossip over tea at luncheon — show up in just, aprons and brooches. They use various accents from the British Isles, with assorted degrees of accuracy.

Cora Fauset, a frequent costume designer for Vermont theatrical productions, is clad in her black funeral finest, including a gold brooch and a velvet headpiece adorned with black bows, the cords — and kind of looks — like Mrs. Potts from *Sweeney Todd*. "There's no pressure to make [the play] sound as if it were staged," she says. "We're never self-conscious."

"What happens how stays here," adds Keller with a smile.

Keller, who joined the Neighbors in 1986, says the group is hoping to attract some young blood, not only to keep it going but so members can vary the kinds of plays they read. "We love it if we had the kind of audience who would appreciate *The Virgin Monologues*," she says.

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## Meet the Neighbors

Colleen Montgomery joined around the same time as Keller. Her husband, Doug, is one of the die-hard snow-seekers. "All of his other clothes are black T-shirts and jeans," she says. "It used to be a lot more formal, but that changed in the last five or six years. It was part of the charm of it, but it put some people off."

Fancy clothes weren't always the norm. "When living and high thinking and, um, Todd, plain dressing, were the order of the meetings," wrote Neighbors member Lyman Allen in a 1940 history of the group. "I never saw a dinner coat on any man at a meeting... and I still sleep in my history."

Despite the "casual" dress code, members in the 1930s had a field day with their hair, Allen writes. "The ladies wore on their heads a lot of hair which had not grown there, and the men tried with each other to get a luxurious growth on their faces."

If Allen's lively written history is any indication, the Neighbors have always attracted witty wordsmiths. "It is not certainly known who were the parents from whose inspired crania spring, full-grown, like Athena, this lusty child," Allen writes of the birth of the Neighbors. He then rattles off a few of its goldsmiths, describing them with theatrical character descriptions: "Mr. Edward Huntington, rotund and pompous; Professor Goodrich, with twinkling eyes and hair curling over his coat collar; Professor Torrey, with his finely chiseled features, dignified nose and surprising silence of tongue."

The "club for social readings" was guided by several rules, the first of which stipulated that reinforcements should be limited to one course. An ill-fated Shakespeare club, which had formed before the Neighbors with many of the same members, was the inspiration. "I am told that it was wrecked upon the rocks of too elaborate supper, so that it became impossible for members with moderate incomes, such as the clergy, college professors, etc., to keep up with their more wealthy fellow members," writes Allen.

Members, who had to be 20 or older, paid an annual fee of 25 cents — 10

now \$15. If members moved away from Burlington, they became correspondent members. "Evidently, a membership in the Neighbors was as precious a thing that it was not lightly to be lost," Allen writes. "I'll death in da post" was our motto."

The next rule was the most controversial. "The marriage of any member of the club to one not a member shall be considered equivalent to a withdrawal from the club." Newbywads had to be voted in anew. "New York's Four Hundred had nothing on us," writes Allen, referring to the members of Manhattan's high society. "We were a very select club, and we glomed to keep ourselves free from embarrassing alliances."

At various points, the Neighbors included Vermont governors Philip Hoff and George Allen. "It was a very elite social club when it started out," says Mary Gudmund, the current secretary-treasurer, who joined with her husband, Luther — then superintendent of Burlington schools — in 1953. "You had to be invited. When I started in earnest, there was a lot of people who had been thrown out."

Until the Neighbors moved their meetings to Burlington's Ritz Club sometime in the 1930s, they gathered in members' homes. Accordingly, keeping membership to fewer than 60 was a priority. Many Neighbors commended everyone into the grand parlors of their large Hill Section Victorian houses.

These days — even without the formal gowns, strict membership rules and boozy dinners (the group stopped serving alcohol more than a decade ago out of concern about drunk driving, says Smith) — the Neighbors gathering still feels a little like a secret society.

Maybe it's the attire of the audience on a Monday night. Or simply the way these folks laugh at a perfectly delivered line. They seem to be in on something that most of us aren't that all you really need to make a memorable night is a crowd of good friends and a great script. ☺

**B** If you're interested in joining the Neighbors, email Mary Gudmund at [mgud@post.vee.net](mailto:mgud@post.vee.net).

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# Say What?

Examining the origins and uncertain future of the Vermont accent.

BY DAN ROLLES

**N**ew England offers a treasure trove of distinctive dialects. The Boston accent is the most famous. Both New Hampshire and Maine have well-known, provincially charming native draws. And there's whatever the Rhode Island accent is, some bizarre linguistic hybrid of Scottish and the Bronx. Though they all have their defining characteristics, each state's dialect also shares commonalities — the dropped "R" that turns "car" into "cark," for example.

And then there's Vermont.

To put it bluntly, native Vermonters talk kinda funny. The native twang is an odd mixture of rurally pronounced vowel sounds and casually omitted — and sometimes completely ignored — consonants that make it unique among its regional brethren. The dialect is also a vital link to local heritage that, like

so many other aspects of traditional Vermont life, is fading away.

To understand what is happening to the Vermont accent, it's important to understand where it comes from.

"It really comes down to how the different parts of New England were settled," explains University of Vermont

linguistics professor John Roberts, who, since 1995, has studied the Vermont dialect. He received a grant from the National Science Foundation to conduct the first in-depth explanation of the state's accent. Over the years, she has taped and examined the speech patterns of hundreds of native (though not Native American) Vermonters.

Roberts says much of Vermont was populated as a "secondary settlement" by individuals moving from other New England areas such as Massachusetts

and Connecticut. In other words, Vermont was settled by first-timers.

Surprisingly, Roberts says she has yet to find evidence that the state's French Canadian heritage had any influence on the state's dialect, though she admits to not having much data from along the Canadian border.

"Clearly there are a lot of place names and people with French roots," she says. "But in terms of the dialect, it seems to be more the British variety."

Roberts suspects the reason is that, though the French arrived in Vermont before the British, they tended not to stay.

"They were largely traders, and when moved along once their business was done," she says. "The British stayed towns and stayed."

Roberts notes that geographical

barriers played an important role in the development of the Vermont dialect. She also identifies two distinct versions of the accent. "There is a dialect boundary that runs right up the middle of Vermont, along the Green Mountains," she says.

East and south of the Green Mountains, the local twangmore closely resembles that of New Hampshire and southern New England West of the mountains — including parts of northern New York — in whose use twang that is generally considered to be the "real" Vermont accent. Or at least what's left of it.

Like many other Yankee dialects, Vermont's accent traces its lineage to England and Scotland. Despite that shared history, the Vermont dialect is noticeably different from the better-known dialects found in Massachusetts or Maine.

Among the key distinctions is what Roberts calls *hoisting* and *raising*. *Hoisting* is a speech characteristic that turns a word like "row" into "lee-ow." *Raising* is a series of vowel sounds — "I" in particular — so that a word like "low" becomes "leew."

Another key component of Vermont speech is a glottal stop that takes the place of the "r" sound, so that "Milton" becomes "Mil-lun." "Vermont" becomes "Verrrnt." Roberts points out that the glottal stop is common to certain areas of British English, particularly in working-class dialects, where a word like "gray" becomes "gr-y."

Turbridge Hamaker John O'Brien has logged many hours with old-time Vermonters, most notably for his 1996 monodrama, *Man With a Plan*, which chronicled the unlikely Congressional campaign of elderly Vermont farmer Fred Tuttle. Many viewers of the film may think subtitles to parse the gloriously thick accents of Tuttle and his friends.

"I always thought Fred's friend Kemmer Gilman had the classic Vermont accent," O'Brien says. "Korner never said much, but when he did speak it sounded something like a Yorkshire cattle auction on a tin canner radio."

Perhaps a more well-known example of the Vermont dialect comes from Rusty Bellows, a local — though not native — actor and comedian. He's made a career of caricaturing the Vermont accent through his persona, and one-on-one shows "The Loggins."

"It's a great example of what we call in linguistics 'performance speech,'" says Roberts. "In other words, he does a great job of picking out features that are most offbeat. And he exaggerates them."

so he sounds like the quintessential old Vermonter."

DeWitt, who was born in Philadelphia but grew up in Vermont, concludes his stage show in an act, an amalgam of various local characters and accents he's encountered and observed over the years. But even in casual speech, he naturally falls into a slight Vermont twang.

"When I was a youngster, I worked with guys who had the accent," he says. "I took it in and enjoyed it."

DeWitt worked a variety of blue-collar jobs in Vermont, from truck driving to construction. He says the camaraderie with his fellow workers influenced Vermont-speak into his own speech.

"Your lexicon and tones change depending upon who you're hanging around," he says.

Roberts notes that accents generally tend to be strongest in working-class groups, which helps explain why what remains of the Vermont accent tends to be found in more rural parts of the state, especially in farming communities. But, much like the family tree in the decline in Vermont, so, too, is the persistence of the Vermont accent.

"It is kind of dying out," Roberts says. "Though that's sort of an oversimplification in any." As the state becomes less agricultural and increasing urbanization increasingly influence the culture, the Vermont accent is getting homogenized into generic American-speak. But Roberts says it's happening in stages.

"It doesn't just happen in a genera-

stop, particularly among younger — and mostly male — Vermonsters, is more pronounced. "The globalization seems to be getting stronger rather than weaker," she says.

Even so, with the declining rural way of life in Vermont, "That's not necessarily the way younger people want to sound," Roberts says. "Unfortunately,

suggests it oodens a lack of sophistication. But Roberts disagrees, saying that the prevalence of certain urban accents is actually on the rise.

"[Accents] may be associated with working class or lower class, and for some people, that's not how they want to sound," she says. "But for others, that is how they want to sound. They're proud of their working-class roots. So there isn't the same impetus for change in cities. And in rural areas, there is a huge amount of change going on."

Roberts adds that the influence of hip-hop has helped intensify urban vernacular. "You don't have that in Vermont," she notes. "There's not a similar rural hip-hop culture that continues to influence Vermont speech."

So, how unique is the Vermont accent?

"There are only so many things you can do with your mouth. And in general, there's probably isn't a feature in Vermont speech you can't find somewhere else," says Roberts. "But what makes a dialect unique is which features [its speakers] put together and in which words they do it."

As DeWitt might say, "Her gosh darned night!" ☐

## KERMIT NEVER SAID MUCH, BUT WHEN HE DID SPEAK IT SOUNDED SOMETHING LIKE A YORKSHIRE CATTLE AUCTION ON A TRANSISTOR RADIO.

JOHN O'BRIEN

test," she explains. "Different features work at different paces. And though the Vermont dialect may be weakening, it does so in its own special way."

Roberts also observes that certain aspects of the accent are actually increasing. She has found that, though the fading and rising of vowel sounds is generally less noticeable, the glottal

farting is not as viable an occupation as it once was, so they need to find something else to do. If they want to be successful. And, in some ways, success is disconnected with agriculture. Therefore, ascending that way is less popular than it once was."

One might assume that to be the case with any strong regional accent, if it



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# Blade Runner

An artist tests her mettle on the ice, and the canvas

BY KATHARINE MONTSTREIN



A friend texts me a photograph of bluish-tinted slides with distant clouds. It was taken from the black ice in the middle of the lake. You'd think I would be happy for him, right? The photo is so beautiful, I can't stop going back to it, completely mesmerized but also *admittedly* envious. Envious that he was out there, that he was brave enough to be on that ice. I am perfectly satisfied with my day until I see that photo.

The next day, a group of friends email to say they're going out for a big lake skate. That probably means out to the middle of the very deep Lake Champlain. On the ice. Just a little layer of frozen water between them and the silky bottom. Word on the street is that the ice is 10 inches thick, completely adequate for a bunch of skaters and even some four-wheeling ice skaters.

So I should go, right? No. You scored. Do you know what's under that ice? Lately black water that's all depends, at best. If you find a weak spot and fall in, God help

you. But these skaters are experienced. One is even from Canada. His mama may have been wearing skates when she birthed him. They do that up there, don't they?

Still not going. Second email arrives early on the morning of the skate. This one assures me that they can chisel-rope me in to keep me from dragging on the bottom of the bay, should the ice give. What I need to feel safe is to stay at home and paint. And drink coffee. That's safe. Besides, I have a cold. Yeah, I'm sick.

Right, am. It'll leave in five minutes, I can meet them at the Mallards Bay boat launch and just skate around the dock. I don't have to go out to where the water under the ice would be over my head, I can just check it out. I get my skates.

Arriving right on time, I seriously grab my two screwdrivers and rope and head down to the dock. The screwdrivers are tied in a rope that goes through my jacket sleeves and around the back of my neck, just like mittens for soldiers. Then they're taped top-down to the rope

ends, so I don't impale myself if I trip, that honestly, impalement sounds way better than sinking into the icy depths of Lake Champlain in February.

Skates on, we head out. Am I going out? I guess, just for a bit. And besides, this is just about getting a little Vitamin D, we Vermonters need that this time of year. Almost instantly, I am transformed. The beauty of the ice with its reflections and variety of textures on the surface is so unexpected. The ice keeps changing. One moment it looks like frozen clouds floating in indigo, then big bubbles under the surface, followed by Monet-like patterns that remind me of those water lily paintings.

We skate out, and I am seduced by the safety in numbers idea. We come

**f** Katharine Montstrein is a Burlington painter. Her work can be viewed at [katharine.com](http://katharine.com).

See Katharine Montstrein's painting, "Black Ice" on this month's inside cover.



to a fissure that has probably formed overnight. This giant crack runs across the bay and has opened to reveal dark, scary water oozing up from its depths. We find a narrow spot and, one by one, we cross. Breathes.

We head out and I dig at my pocket for my camera. The first five minutes into the skate, I'm so startled by the landscape that I'm certain I can't paint it. No way could I capture the feeling of this ice. So I just drink in the views, and don't even entertain the idea of making this into "art."

In what feels like the middle of the lake, we find three ice fishermen all set up. Their four-wheelers are loaded with gear, a giant sugar bunged to the back of one of them. Perfectly drilled holes allow the fishermen access to the water, and their buckets are ready for the catch. They reel up perch after perch at an alarming rate. The men seem completely at ease. That's reassuring.

It's going on mid-morning and I need to get back soon. We look south and see the Colchester Island Line, north and see the South Hess Causeway. I never thought I would get this far. I make an announcement: I've got to head back. No

big deal, I will just stay on the original skate marks. Someone offers to escort me, but he would leave the group, and I don't feel it's necessary. I get this.

I head back and stop to see the fishermen, who ask if I got lost. "No," I reply. "I just gotta get back to work!" I explain my strategy of taking the same route. In a heavy French Canadian accent the man tells me to be careful — "De ice changes" Oh.

With this new information, I decide to skate back like Eric Hendon. No, like

**I COME TO THE BIG FISSURE AND TRY NOT TO THINK THAT, AT ANY MOMENT, ANOTHER COULD OPEN.**

Apollo Oban: Really, really fast, just "get 'er done." Funny, I didn't notice on the way out how even the skating was smooth. This skate is coming from all around, sounding like distant thunder, or a crying whale. Why is it so loud now? And where did this beehive-like come from?

About half way back, I wonder, What the hell did I just do? My friends are now about three miles away. Should

the unthinkable happen... My thoughts wander to the worst-case scenario: Do I really have the strength to pull myself and what would be a 50-pound-skiing-wet peris out of a hole in the ice? With two little screwdrivers? I had to get back to work. Work? Do I even have a job? Still!

Skat up and skate, skat up and skate, skat up and skate. It becomes my mantra.

I come to the big fissure and try not to think that, at any moment, another could open. I cautiously cross it.

Skat up and skate, skat up and skate, skat up and skate.

The last launch is in the distance, and I should be done in five to 10 minutes. People are starting ahead at the bay. This is good sign. Today, I have challenged myself as a big boy and I am almost there. The stupid college quote under my yearbook photo read, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all." That's total horse poop, if it's meant

to describe myself. But today, I'm living by it.

For boaters are launching as I arrive on shore. The damn pair of boots we'd left lined up along the dock brings a smile to my face. I imagine the group being relieved to see nice gear, knowing I returned safely and they didn't have to call the search-and-rescue team. I get out my phone and text my husband, my best friend and my pals on the ice, who may be somewhere near Canada by now. Just three words: "Off the ice!" I feel my blood pressure drop.

Arriving home, I have this overwhelming urge to paint the ice. It's a puzzle, a really hard one. How do you make ice look brown and not like open water? I have no idea, but a blank canvas is ready to go. I don't even get out of my sweaty skate clothes before staring at said painting of the morning's skate.

Six pins, still working. Absorbed everything else. I was going to do today: no shower, no dinner, no laundry, didn't hang the pictures I processed. Just painting.

I admit to praying for snow as much as the next person, but apparently there is at least one silver lining to a cold and snowless winter: black ice on the lake. ☼



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**JAY PEAK**



Owner Savitri Bhagavati and her son-in-law stand in the MINT in 2009 before the flooding.

# Claim: Denied

The post-Irene saga of Waitfield's MINT Restaurant & Tea Lounge

BY CORIN HIRSCH

**T**he first sign of trouble at Waitfield's MINT Restaurant & Tea Lounge came around noon on the day Tropical Storm Irene hit Vermont — August 26, 2011. A neighbor popped his head in to tell owners Savitri Bhagavati and Hyan Deskar that "there might be a problem" with the nearby river.

A short time later, they learned water was being turned off in the building, which stands on Waitfield's Bridge Street, a few hundred yards from the Mad River. Floodwater was filling a nearby parking lot. The couple closed up and called out their subleek. "Essentially, we saved the truck," says Deskar, the chef.

And later that day, the 11,000-square-foot vegetable eatery eventually succumbed to four feet of water, which ruined its kitchen equipment, food, furniture, and, of course, walls and carpeted floors. When Bhagavati saw some of their wine



Clashed at MINT after Irene.

upheaved chairs bobbing in the water, the scale of the disaster "kind of hit me," she recalls.

Still, at the back of her mind was

a beam of light in the storm: MINT was covered by flood insurance, which the couple had purchased when they opened the business in 2009. "Thank God," Bhagavati remembers thinking.

**YOU COMMIT TO REBUILDING,  
AND THEN YOU FIND OUT  
EVERYTHING YOU'VE  
DONE IS FUTILE.**

SAVITRI BHAGAVATI

That was then. Over the coming months, MINT's quest to rebuild would become a cautionary tale for other Vermont restaurants about the bureaucratic labyrinth of insurance and the inherent risks of doing business on a

floodplain — even for those who think they've covered all their bases.

When Bhagavati and Deskar opened MINT in the Waitfield Hotel building, they were fresh from Los Angeles and unfamiliar with life on a 300-year floodplain like the one where their new business partially resided. Still, being careful people, they opted for a National Flood Insurance Program policy, which they cost about \$160 a year and insured them for up to \$250,000. After the May floods of 2011, Bhagavati applied that to \$50,000.

Covered in total by Congress, NFIP is a sort of "heart of last resort" for those who reside in areas prone to flooding, according to Robert Deskarlein, the New England manager of NFIP for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. NFIP coverage is sold through local agents, administered by a carrier, and guaranteed and paid out by the federal government.

If that sounds complicated, it is. Bhagavati purchased MINT's policy through Deena, Richer & Brown in Montpelier, which asked her to fill out a questionnaire about her business. The agency forwarded that to NFIP, which approved it and issued the policy.

The day after Irene, when Bridge Street looked like a muddy sea now filled with ruined furniture, equipment, and dented business owners, Bhagavati and Deskar muddled out alongside their neighbors. As they pushed mud out of the entry, they kept their phone cameras fully charged and diligently took pictures of every bit of damage. Haunted by the fact that they were covered, "We never really thought about not calling back. Our work started right away," says Bhagavati.

The couple's landlord, Norman Abend, eventually replaced the restaurant's walls and floors, which took about three months. "When something gets flooded, mud gets deposited in places you never thought it could," says Abend. Also during the fall, an independent auditor for NFIP arrived to survey the damage.

As Bhagavati and Deskar waited to get back into the space, they served up lunches in the basement of the Waitfield United Church of Christ. In late November they were finally able

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# SIDEdishes

BY CORIN MURPHY & ALICE LEVITT

## iBienvenidos!

THE MAD TACO 228 HAN STREET  
MONTPELIER 05602

The year is over. The weekend, the MADTACO family three open the doors of their second location, in Montpelier, rolling out heavy Mexican breakfasts and firm-to-table tacos stuffed with the likes of pork belly and achiche chicken. The ramp-up to the occasion wasn't without drama.

The 11-month entry is a collaboration between the owners of nearby **THIRD STREET TAVERN** and **JAY'S TAVERN**, chef at the Mad Taco's original Watfield location. Both are meat and produce from local farms, but whereas Watfield's concept was as lunch and dinner, owners in the capital can also fill themselves up with heavier nachos and potato bowls in the morning and dishes such as ceviche later in the day. Co-owner **MIKE ABRAMS** says chef **SARAH THOMPSON** (formerly of **THOMPSON CO.**) may also serve up dips, soups and other out-of-the-ordinary sides.

The entry was originally slated to open in December, but the owner of neighboring **CHARLIE'S**, **JEFF JACOBI**, allegedly objected to the owners' plan to install a hood system on the roof facing his business, which was key to having a flyer inside the tapeteria.

In a release dated February 12, the Mad Taco owners claim that they collaborated on the project with Jacobs' verbal approval, only to be met with resistance on the eve of installation. They decided to install the hood on the other side of the building, the letter contends, but began to believe Jacobs would continue to appeal zoning decisions on their behalf, citing his concerns.

Rather than pay rent on empty space, the Mad Taco's owners decided to

move ahead without a flyer, but the experience left its mark. "We believe that this town is not owned by one man, but by the collective people. It's unfortunate that the whims of one person could cost a group of entrepreneurs [at] five-sometimes thousands of dollars in wasted resources, time and effort," reads the press release.

**JOHN ABRAMS**, property manager with Montpelier Property Management, refuted some of the facts against his father. The elder Jacobs never offered verbal approval, he says, and he was most concerned with the potential fly hazard — he hoped to see drawings of the hood system that were never offered. "There's this perception that we don't want businesses coming to town unless we're going to be creating it. That's not true. The more businesses that are successful in downtown Montpelier, the better it is for all of us."

No flyer means the Mad Taco had no plans for fried fish tacos and churros, among other dishes. Jacobs wouldn't comment on the letter, but remained upbeat. "It didn't hurt as too much," he says. "We had a great weekend, and we're very excited."

— C.H.

## Growing Markets

CITY MARKET AND HEALTHY LIVING TO OPEN NEW LOCATIONS

Ever wished you could shop at **CITY MARKET** without venturing into, well, the city? General manager **TEAM NARAN** has announced that the co-op board plans to open a second neighborhood location in the greater Burlington area.

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## Downtown Prime

A STEAK HOUSE WILL REPLACE SAKURA BANA ON CHURCH STREET

As longtime owner of **MALIBU'S SPORTS CAFE**, **TIM HALVORSON** knows a thing or two about what Church Street diners want. As soon as this summer, he'll open a steak house just two doors up from his existing restaurant, in the space left vacant by **Sakura Bana Japanese Restaurant** when it closed last month.



"Not just any steak house, either. 'My hope is to do a high-end USDA Prime steak house,'" says Halvorson. "I think there's a market for it. Even in Burlington, USDA is a cut above."

Halvorson is still in the early stages of planning and remodeling the dining room and kitchen of his new restaurant. He hopes to knock down a wall and connect the steak house's kitchen with the one at Malibu's, allowing staff to go back and forth. He's already interviewing chefs to command the team that will be cooking top-quality steaks and making noodle appetizers.

"Since Delmonico's in New York, there probably hasn't been an original [idea for a steak house]." It's just about picking and choosing for this marketplace, Halvorson says. His choices will include plenty of the grill's classics, including wedge and chopped salads and sides of creamed spinach for the wet-aged herb of beef.

Halvorson also foresees a booming "grown-up" bar scene for the restaurant, which will initially open only for dinner. "I hope it's a busy place where people feel like they can come in and share," he says. "We really want the full steak house experience." A trendy proposition.

— A.L.

in market research for food co-ops, identified the need for a second store. It mentioned City Market's "very high sales-per-square-foot performance level" and parking zones as indicators that shoppers might have a better experience if they

weren't all packed into one location. Two less-crowded stores with easier parking, instead of one congested one, looked like the obvious way to go, says Niles.

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## Claim: Denied

to begin reconstruction, using a combination of funds: a loan from the Vermont Economic Development Authority, a grant from the Mad River Valley Community Fund, private donations, and their own credit cards. The cost of rebuilding added up to about \$44,000, on top of lost revenues from four months of lost business.

On December 18, shortly before their planned reopening, Blagovest and Deshay received "the letter." Their carrier, Union Mutual Fire Insurance Company, formally announced that NFIP

loses "You are afraid, what if it happens again?" wonders Deshay.

Above all, they wondered why they'd been sold a policy that was essentially no profit. Examined more closely, the sequence of events is almost Kafkaesque.

When they applied for flood insurance, Blagovest filed out a questionnaire that asked if her premises were on the "lowest floor only above ground level." Believing MINT was a ground-floor establishment — as did her landlord — and unaware of the corresponding elevation requirement, she affirmed this.

Who verifies such a claim? In some cases, an insurance agent asks for an elevation certificate, which is sent to the level of a building's lowest floor relative to the ground. In MINT's case, none was required or requested. No agent or engineer visited, and the application was approved. When the area space flooded back in 1999, the NFIP claim had been paid.

But after time, with NFIP experiencing its own flood of claims, those 3 1/2 inches suddenly mattered. "Basements are a big deal" when it comes to NFIP claims, says Deshay. "The rules have to be the same for everybody, and they have to be applied evenly. Nobody has the authority to say, 'OK, we'll make an exception for a business.' It's a federal product that can't be interpreted loosely. At a result, there can be a lot of anger spent because people weren't aware of the policy conditions."

Blagovest and Deshay's denial letter arrived less than two weeks before MINT was slated to open. "This pulled the rug from under our feet," says Deshay. The kitchen: The letter arrived at the same time it was in order to renew their flood insurance.



Blagovest and Deshay, who says that nowhere as his own insurance policy does it state that the building even has a basement. The space does not meet the definition of basement by the town of Wardsboro's standards, either. "Because you can walk into MINT from ground level, I would not consider this a basement," writes Susan K. Jennings, the town's planning and zoning administrator. "However, insurance definitions and rules are different." When Blagovest and Deshay had an engineer look at MINT after NFIP's denial, they found that the restaurant was technically 3 1/2 inches below grade, or ground level.

To start MINT, you need to walk down a railroad-tie step from an alley, then descend another step inside the restaurant. Somewhere in those two steps lies the crucial 3 1/2-inch margin that cost the couple \$38,285.33 in rebuilding costs — and left them responsible for future

More food after the classified section. [bit.ly/180](http://bit.ly/180)

# SIDEdishes

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43

the macropopulation of the Archibald Street area in northern Burlington, downtown Winooski and the South End Pine Street corridor to see which could best sustain a new market. According to Wilco, Pine Street was out, but that doesn't mean City Market is dropping South End and either just yet. "We have to really begin our internal process," he explains. "We work with a board of directors. We have to vet, agree upon our policies."

Wilco can't name a projected opening date this early in the process, but don't count out Winooski or Archibald Street just yet. Either could become the location for yet a third City Market, he says.

More than 100 miles from Burlington, in Stratton Springs, NY,

**HEALTHY LIVING MARKET** is opening its own second location. Construction of the 35,000-square-foot store will most likely begin this summer. Like the South Burlington Healthy Living, the new market will feature a full and full-service meat and fish counter.

The college town will get a little healthier — and tastier — when the market opens in January 2005.

## Crumbs

LEFTOVER FOOD NEWS

In the last three years, 333 North Main Street in St. Albans' JC Penney Shopping Center has been home to **SEVIE'S MEAT & SEAFOOD** and **JEN'S PLACE**. Last week, that space saw a complete departure from that home-style American trend — the

opening of **RAMA JAPANESE RESTAURANT**, which specializes in hibachi-style dishes, says **MEDEA**, transitioning for owner **DAVID CHEN**. Diners shouldn't expect a **BBQ-style** show, since the Three hibachi steaks are cooked in the safety of the kitchen. The sushi, including several different roll rolls, is already getting high marks from customers, claims La.

— A.L.

Gordon Ramsay, the fiery British chef who has made his career as much from revamping failing restaurants on camera as from his culinary prowess, traveled to Windsor's Jax for H&M earlier this month for an upcoming episode of his "Hotel Hell" television series.

A century-old, 28-room restaurant, Jumper 1911 Inn has been known for its somewhat formal vibe.

No longer. After Gordon's visit, the inn has a brand-new bar, **BLUE BAR**, with a tavern menu filled with comfort food dishes such as country plate with Maplehead Farms maple mustard and a perfect sandwich with French fries, according to co-owner **ROBERT DEAN**. New chef **KEVIN JAMES** is also carrying an approachable farm-to-table menu that the more formal **BARBERSHOP** **BOOKS**, with pub-inspired food and red-wine brewed lamb shank among the fare.

"He is a power to be reckoned with," says Dean of Ramsay. "He is direct and insightful. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

A producer for "Hotel Hell" says the episode should air sometime this spring on the FOX network.

— C.H.



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The couple contacted the state's Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities and Health Care Administration for assistance. BBH&A officials, though sympathetic, didn't believe the agent had sold them a policy in error and said they had no authority to force NFIP to pay up. A letter from Hickok & Boardman, master agency to Deane, Rucker & Brown, also expresses regret for MINT's situation, but asserts that "[Bhagwati's] loss is not due to any fault of DRB" and that her dispute is with the insurer after policy, NFIP with respect to its [sic] definition of basement; and with the NFIP adjuster who determined that her premises were located below grade level."

"Therein is the argument we've been trying to make to FEMA. Whose definition of a basement does it meet?" says Michael Boardman, senior vice president of Hickok & Boardman, but says his agency has been wrangling with FEMA on behalf of its clients regarding any number of claims. But businesses are more "black and white. The crux of the matter is that specific definition."

Boardman wouldn't comment on MINT's claim specifically, but he noted that NFIP, for all its disputed details,

"has paid millions of dollars in flood claims after losses."

On a late afternoon, MINT buzzes with lunchtime customers tucking into richly flavored, vegetarian rice bowls, lentil soup and salads. Sun spills inside through broad front windows facing an alley. Inside, the entry is still colorful, with abstract painted murals and more spacious now, too, with an unobstructed maple bar, shimmery purple curtains and no-open kitchen.

One front window, though, still bears faint marks indicating how high the floodwaters rose during Irene. Through all of the cleaning and rebuilding, Bhagwati kept them intact as a reminder of what happened there.

The space is serene and elegant, yet, talking with Bhagwati and Deane, one gets a sense of how precarious their business' survival might be. The couple have nothing but kind words for their neighbors, their landlord and state agencies, but they still feel intensely vulnerable to another flood.

"You come to rebuilding, and then you find out everything you're done is futile," says Bhagwati with a sigh. She's delayed filing a appeal with FEMA until

she's sure it does not preclude seeking legal damages. "We're not people who get depressed easily, but this has been really hard."

When it rains heavily, water still seeps in to the front part of the restaurant, the couple have been forced to close for service twice after reopening. Ahead is exploring a solution, but he sounds weary after the Irene ordeal. "I'm 60 years old and getting tired," says the landlord, who eventually recouped about 40 percent of his own \$175,000 loss.

"We had insurance. We were prepared," says Bhagwati. "What could tell me what I should have done? No one can tell me what I should have done. I would urge everyone to look into their own situation to make sure they are covered."

It's sage advice: Boardman says that in the wake of Irene, his agency is seeing more flood insurance. "I'm not sure people are interested in having flood insurance that didn't have it before."

If another catastrophic flood hits Vermont, NFIP insurance could spell the difference between survival and a/n for many. But, as Bhagwati and Deane have learned, the gray area can get you. ☐

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# Diner on Fire

Taste Test: El Cortijo Taqueria Y Cantina

BY ALICE LEVITT

There's nothing all that wrong with most of the Mexican restaurants in the Burlington area. Even 30 years ago, Vermonters probably would have been thrilled just to have more than 30 spots in Chittenden County serving south-of-the-border fare. Now we have options ranging from the slightly-better-than-Taco-Bell offerings of Mo's Southwest Grill to the sometimes-opulent margaritas at El Gate Chateau.

But, thanks to indie TV programs and travel, today's Burlingtonians are a tough crowd to satisfy. Many lament that they still haven't found simple, fresh food that's more Mexican than Ten-Mex.

They may finally find an answer to their prayers in El Cortijo Taqueria Y Cantina. Between carefully sourced (read, good-quality) seasonal ingredients and the use of local foods when possible, El Cortijo does the near-impossible: It brings the taste of a sunny Mexican market square to gray, wintry Burlington.

El Cortijo, which translates as "the farmhouse," shares with the Farmhouse Tap & Grill its owners, Catherine Hopewell, and its chef, Philip Clayton. In many ways, however, the newer restaurant, which opened at lunchtime on New Year's Day, has out-own-gate with more success than its big brother did. Over two years, the menu offered no major disappointments and several home runs.

Before we get to tastes, though, a word about visual aesthetics. In its first week open, El Cortijo's exterior came under fire from Roadside-Galaxie, a website that curates information on historical diners. The neon-orange-and-blue awning and candy-colored signs added to the 1954 Monogram View bread driver captured writer Heidi Garbin to call it "Burlington's Taco Bell."

Diners who aren't diner purists, though, may find the building's interior more or less the same, minus its original seats and with a few wonders bordering on the weirdly's colors. Both bar and booths were few places to park for a casual meal, complete with food photos showing the counter that menu did me of ordering at American Shishkaboo is a bid. The bathroom is something special. Suffice it to say, you may feel guilty advising the owner.



Even on a recent Monday evening, El Cortijo was packed, but fortunately two spots were available at the counter. With only 35 seats to offer, the restaurant's owners encourage tolerance. "Don't break out. If we're full, simply place your order to go," the laminated placemat menu instructs. Online ordering is coming soon, as are inexpensive lunch specials, which will make it even easier for me to bring some back to my desk at Seven Days.

I'll be sure to order the lengua two when I do. Yes, that means tongue, and no, you don't need to gramine. Just think of it as cubes of beautifully leavened,

flavorful beef with an appetizing crispness on the outside. Paper-thin, pink slices of fresh chili relleno, but most of the wrap's flavor comes from a dense helping of cilantro and the best salsa verde I've had in Vermont.

That salsa verde is El Cortijo's secret weapon. Anything it touches turns almost overwhelmingly delicious. Its tanginess makes one salivate, and a pleasant burn grows with each bite.

I chose it instead of the salsa roja with my order of salsa y guacamole. The menu is true: The chips at El Cortijo kept warm in a convection

that resembles a movie theater popcorn machine, don't automatically come with your meal. With salsa, though, they're just an extra \$1.50. Add guacamole and it's \$6, well worth the expense, since the portion is large enough to make a meal. The guac was suitably creamy and more flavorful than many I've sampled locally, but I would not have minded a little more lemon or coriander. Mixed with a bit of salsa verde, though, it was perfect.

Nearly every one of the nine tacos on the menu — along with daily specials — has a different sauce. Only the lengua and spicy-rubbed pulled chicken share the verde. No complaints there, though I found the latter taco to be slightly overfilled with lettuce. I want meat to dominate, not serve as an escort.

Filler wasn't a problem in most of the tacos. They're small, but there are plenty to make a meal. At \$3.90 to \$4.50 each, I found them a good value, considering the labor involved in hand-cutting everything from tortillas to queso fresco, and the cost of high-quality, line-caught fish or grass-fed beef.

The dinner appears in the form of ceviche and a scrappy fish taco as delicately fried. I could barely tell where ceviche ended and fish began. I loved the tart purple cabbage slaw that dressed it, too.

The ceviche taco, filled with slices of barbecued pork shoulder, was also noteworthy. Like a black-on-black outfit, the dish was composed of layered ankle flavors: first local pig, then pleasantly spicy chipotle sauce. The taste trend was broken only by the smooth and yielding corn tortilla and some lettuce shreds.

Though not usually a drinker, I couldn't resist the call of the "volcano" margarita, flavored with jalapeño essence. Fresh lime juice wreaked with agave nectar gave the drink a sweet-and-sour edge on which to balance a powerful burn that ran down my throat with each sip. The salt-rimmed cocktail isn't so much a housewrecker as a maintenance.

Without a doubt, El Cortijo caters to meat eaters and fans of butter and beer (one of Three reside in the cooler alongside local craft brews). But it's also making an honest effort to please vegetarian customers.

From queso fundido to papas, or spicy pumpkin seeds, almost all the

# food

appetizers are mindless or can be made that way: the tortilla soup, for instance, is available with or without chicken. The vegetarian cornote taco, however, was my least favorite of the lot, with its counterpart of chunky organic sweet potatoes, brined kale and the aforementioned pepitos. In guajillo salsa was the saltiest, both in terms of spice and overall flavor, a fact that didn't help the soggy kale.

I preferred that salsa when it appeared in two dishes at El Cortijo's weekend brunch. The first was the \$3.50 huevos divorcidos. That's "divorced eggs" to you Americans, a note that comes from the dish's traditional origin: playing these two everyday eggs on tortillas just can't seem to get along, as customarily indicated by the burner of chickpeas or refried beans between them.

When I tried it at El Cortijo, the breaking appeared more amicable. The two eggs rested on separate tortillas atop a pile of melted queso fresco, but chunks of red and green sauce roiled between the two, along with a smattering of cilantro and chopped raw onion. I guess those were community property. The black beans on the plate were a lovely addition, adding a sweet balance of fat and earthy tones.

We also spring for the \$3 side of breakfast potatoes. I'm not usually a hash-brown fan, but these were brilliantly seasoned, crisp and layered with finely sliced onions and red peppers. Mine landed was another nice touch, prepared that morning in the restaurant's giant, cast-iron skillet.

Cornote tacos, stuffed with house-made sausage, could have used more spice, but they made a pleasant contribution with scallion-speckled scrambled eggs, queso fresco and more of the mild guajillo salsa.

Then I hit into the first truly memorable new dish of 2012. On paper, the tomatillo taco isn't so different from the other, even black-bean brunch options. It has the same scrambled eggs and ample stuffing of cilantro. The difference is in the sauce: a worthy combination of ultra-creamy queso fresco, cubes of meaty house-made bacon and char broasted, sautéed salsa verde. For more than an hour after I finished it, I felt restless, still craving it and wanting more. Is there a better way to turn up burgeoning addiction?

To get an end to the torture, I tried both of El Cortijo's desserts, which are available plated or packaged in a wax paper to grab and go. I chose the latter option.

The Mexican brownie was dense and chocolaty, but benefited from undertones of cinnamon and coconut milk. It wasn't spicy, as I had imagined. That is, until the final bite, which left my lips burning with a clamp of unseasoned chili flakes.

To the surprise of this chocolate lover, I preferred the Mexican wedding cookies. Covered with powdered sugar, flavored with almond and a whisper of cinnamon, they crumbled with buttery ease. The \$2 bag held three, but I could have easily eaten several bags in one sitting.

And that's the beauty of El Cortijo: With its small portions and prices to match, I can try lots of different treats — such as the stellar Nango taco, composed of ground goat meat and "three sisters" veggies (corn, beans, squash) on fry bread, a recent special prepared by former *Diners* (*Ducado*) chef Richard Waring. Or I can simply gorge on my favorites. There's one, I'm looking at you. ☺

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## FEB. 21 | MUSIC

When Xiao Fei Hong was a young girl, she'd heard of the violin and the piano, but not the guitar. It's on big mystery why. She was born in China in 1972, just a year after the decade-long

Cultural Revolution ended. The movement's heavy restrictions on musical composition and performance effectively stifled the country's musical culture — and, as the first-ever guitar major at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music, Ying helped spur its rebirth. Now heralded as one of the world's top classical guitarists, she now is Middlebury College with a mixed repertoire, including the

Alfred's *Aurora*, Leo Sowerby's *Guitar Sonata*, and here you have an arrangement of Johannes Sebastian Bach's *Violin Sonata no. 1 in G Major*.



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FEB. 21 &amp; 22 | MUSIC

## Hauling Brass

Whether it's a song of political protest or simply his own take on the South African street songs he heard growing up, Hugh Masekela's music comes with a side of activism. "You're very concerned about giving back to my country by showing off what Africa has — because it's limitless," the transposer once told *Southland's Masekela*. His homeland's traditions and resilient people have certainly supplied rich subject matter throughout his nearly 60-year career — and though he's sung anthems in support of living Nelson Mandela, it's not all heavy stuff. Masekela's latest release, named *Johannes* for its joyous sound, pays homage to South African wedding practices. Say "Hi Ma" to this feast of music and dance, which comes to Hanover and Burlington this week.

### HUGH MASEKELA

Tuesday February 21 7 p.m. at Spaulding Auditorium, Hopkins Center, Dartmouth College in Hanover R: \$10-40, info: 603-645-2402; [hop.dartmouth.edu](http://hop.dartmouth.edu)  
Wednesday February 22 7:30 p.m. at Flynn Main Stage in Burlington \$15-48 info: 802-386-1111; [flynnstage.org](http://flynnstage.org)



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MASEKELAS

FEB. 16-19 | THEATER

## The French Connection

**E**very family has its secrets, but the Middlebury Community Players are about to let the skeletons out of the closet. Spanning four generations, time and place — the settings range from World War I-era France to present-day Lake Tahoe — Vermont playwright and director David Moats' *An Afternoon in France* explores family ties through an unexpected discovery about the past. Though this marks the play's world premiere, the drama's not quite new. Moats, whose work has been produced by MCP four times already, completed writing it 12 years ago. Finally seeing it onstage "feels great," he says, "mainly because I've got a great cast of characters who are finding in the play what I meant to be there."

### 'AN AFTERNOON IN FRANCE'

Thursday February 16, through Saturday February 18 8 p.m. and Sunday February 19, 2 p.m., at Town Hall Theater in Middlebury \$17 info: 802-922-1000; [townhalltheater.org](http://townhalltheater.org)



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AMONGST ENVIRONMENTAL  
ISSUES & COMMUNITY ISSUES  
BY DANIELA TO

**VIDEO** JAN. 14  
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## calendar

WED. 12.47.48

**WINTER FINGER** Devlin's fingerbreadth  
musicians are in a ring members of the Belmont  
Fidelity and for the State Center Center  
Cultural Arts Project. Donations accepted. (p.10)  
100-560-5180

**YOUTH YU CHENG** Meditation and Tai Chi  
classes are offered in the public and private  
of the city and are held in conjunction with  
the Center for the Study of the Mind. (p.10)  
Center for the Study of the Mind. (p.10)  
100-560-5180

**WOMEN'S POWER WHEELS SERIES**  
Most women's power wheels are in the public  
and private of the city and are held in conjunction  
with the Center for the Study of the Mind. (p.10)  
Center for the Study of the Mind. (p.10)  
100-560-5180

**WOMEN'S POWER WHEELS SERIES**

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Bifurcation

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**WASH STATE 4-H & SNOWSCAPE PROGRAM**  
Weather permitting, kids and adults get snowed out and learn to sled, ski and ice skat. Activities also provided. Schreiner Park, Bellingham, 1-4 p.m. Cost of events: \$10. 604/837-1171

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**CYNTHIA GARDNER** is an artist and artistic director of the Rochester Chamber Music Society, directs the weekly Concert Hall, Mahany Center for the Performing Arts. 8 p.m. [www.artscenter.org](http://www.artscenter.org)

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**JAMES CONWAY** is a professor of infectious diseases and virology, New Center for emerging, zoonotic and reemerging zoonotic diseases, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. He is also a senior advisor at the National Center for Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia.

**L.E. JAZZ** Verve won't big band classics, author  
elects movies. *Argentinean: Spans Movies & p. 11*  
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**EDOUARD MABLER** is a recent transfer from Minnesota. Guiding Bud Miller leads the Rams, a grin around the tough classical compositions. *Palace S.C. Women, San Francisco, 1990*. © 1991 by the artist.

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**STAFF REPORTING** Visual search needs to shift to a higher level.

For more information, contact the publisher at 1-800-451-7001.  
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**TRAVEL HIGHLIGHT** Authorship along roadside latrines new territory in anthropology of the music of Jostimela is Marc Van Der Kooij. The resident spotlight, *Inside Peak* (book review), is by David G. White.

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## education

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8:00-9:00am

419

**OPEN HOUSE:** A short presentation introduces visitors to the program and new facilities of this organization working toward economic, social and racial justice. Champlain Valley Office of Environmental Opportunity Burlington 3-7 p.m. Free. 202-263-0000. [www.cveo.org](http://www.cveo.org)

*Andra de fructuosa*

**MONTREAL, QUEBEC**, Dec 14, 11:30 a.m. (AP) —

**INCHWILLAGE FESTIVAL.** Sun 14th @ 10.00 a.m.  
 10.00 a.m.

## 454

**“BIG EXPERIMENT”** Based on a real-life study, *Over the Mountains in 2001* chronicles the power play between 26 males stationed at “prisoner” and “guard” Regal H. Perry Hall, Champlain College, Burlington, N.Y. **Free** (only, \$14.95, \$24.95)

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**'WAR HORSE'** when his beloved died is told with a simple, poignant grace seldom seen on screen.

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**WEEKEND** Tue-Fri 11:30 pm, Sat 10:30 pm

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**FINANCIAL** The last beneficiary will be helped one-fifth of the way, said H. By the time the foundation was closed in 1982, it had

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**POSTDATE YOUR HOUSE** Received 15.10.15

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5:30 Check-In  
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# New Morning

After years on the road, Sam Cohen finds his voice at home

BY MATT BUSHLOW

**T**here's a moment of evolution when Sam Cohen savors his phrase, the words "seven days" don't register. Neither does "Vocento," *Pace*.

"Oh, shit, it totally kept!" Cohen says. "Wow Ah."

He snuffs the microphone of his phone, takes someone's question, and then responds. He's good. He's ready.

Cohen's momentary lapse is all for the sake of art. He's been awake for 36 hours working on a music video. Though primarily a guitarist, singer, songwriter and headliner, Cohen is also "addicted" to making stop-motion music videos with collages he makes from the pages of old *National Geographic* magazines and *World Book Encyclopedia*.

His music is free radio in 2007 for a song called "Sing to the Earth." It was written by one of the founders in Apollo Sunshams, the band he played with for almost a decade. The song is a dreamy celebration of planet Earth—think pop boogie. The band had wanted to make a video, and Cohen's wife suggested that he buy a bunch of old nature books, cut out the photos of animals, make collages and use them to tell a story.

"I was like, 'Ha! That sounds totally awesome!'" he recalls with a laugh.

Cohen ran with the idea. He then took more than 100 hours to snail 2004 vintage stills, photograph them, and create a narrative using stop-motion animation.

Not long after Apollo Sunshams' 2006 LP, *Shall I Show You*, was released, Cohen and his band mates—Joan Gallagher and Jeremy Black—decided to take a break. According to Cohen, making decisions as a group had become "unconsciously difficult" and drained an energy away from the joy of making music together.

"It just felt like the right time to move into my own creative headspace," Cohen says.

Since then, he's settled in Brooklyn with his wife and started his own project, "Hi! backwards." His first LP, *The Color*, was released in early 2008.

*The Color* expands on the minimalist throwback pop vibe that Cohen aimed on his former tracks from *Shall I Show You*. Only this time around, he got to make all the decisions himself and spend months on what he refers to as his "vacation lab" add-up of vinyl and tape in his home studio. In a way, the album is not so different from his videos. It's the product of Cohen's romantic sense of style and headless attention to detail.

Seven days ago with Cohen last week in anticipation of the *Villawards* last November gig at the Meskay House on Thursday February 14.

**SEVEN DAYS** The Color has been out for about a year. Instead of touring to promote the album, you decided to let the record find an audience and then do some dates. How's that working out for you?

**SAM COHEN** I love playing live, but it is hard sometimes to get a bunch of people to another state in a car [laughs]. We've been playing pretty regularly in [New

York City] and some Boston shows. And we went to South by [Southwest in 2007] and we did a little tour with Josh Ratter. You know I don't have a van [laughs]. I'm just a dude who makes albums and loves to play shows, but I don't really have the whole band "machine" working right now.

**SB:** You had that with Apollo Sunshams, didn't you?

**SC:** Oh, big time. It was a lifestyle. It was a different thing. We were touring constantly in a big converted schoolbus with a trailer. For a couple years with that band, back in 2003-2004, we just lived on the road. We didn't even have apartments.

And now I just kind of like being in a single place. I feel like I'm more productive. I make videos, I write on other people's records, I have a studio. I feel like my output has increased. I was playing shows a little more often, but I do feel like I'm making more art more regularly.

**SB:** What did you learn in the process of making a record more or less by yourself?

**SC:** I guess a lot of it was just learning to be confident and slow, a lesson in self-sufficiency. It felt really liberating to just be like, "Hi! We do, then it's gonna come out." [Laughs] You know? It's not going to be a board meeting about whether this is cool sounding or not.

**SB:** Was there ever challenging the fact that you had to make all these decisions by yourself?

**SC:** Yeah, in a way. It took a long time to figure out what was my own voice inside my head and what was other people's voices. Any criticism that I would give myself I was like, "Now do I think that sucks or do I think that Jesse or Jeremy would think that sucks? Are they right? Or is it something I have a chance to experiment with now—and should?" Things like that. Eventually, I got to be the autistic Jewish guy that I am.

**SB:** So how does it feel to try to promote it and get it out there?

**SC:** It feels good, because we haven't been really heavy handed about it. When I was in Apollo Sunshams, we were depending on that fan base, and that was really stressful. Just being able to take some time now to branch out in different directions, I'm really lucky that I still have a full-time career as a musician, but *Villawards* is not the mainstage tour. It's not my livelihood. So we put it out, and if I get a nice review and someone likes it, that makes me feel good, and it's not like, "Aha! This isn't good enough! This isn't paying my bills!" It's actually really cool, because I don't have to really stress about it. If it's positive stuff, it's great. And I don't need to think that much about any thing else. ☺

**6** *Villawards* play live Monday through in New York City Thursday February 14 at 8:30 pm @

Sam Cohen from *Hi! backwards*

# SOUNDbites

BY DAN BILLES

## Motoring

**CRASHING OUT.** *Describes his new R&B band, (CRASHING OUT),* **MINNEAPOLIS, MN** "I'm from Minneapolis and the Black Keys had a baby! Generally, I'm loathe to use the descriptions bands provide of the members — especially when they rely on the tired 'if so and so had a love child' thing. But I've always liked that one.

First, hypochondria aside, I'm pretty accurate. I've written about Mitchell on a number of occasions over the years. And regardless of the subject, whether it's about D.J.'s house music, his anti-bullying work or just shooting the shit, the topic of Prince often pops up in the conversation. He's probably Mitchell's single biggest musical influence, and it shows.

Second, I just friggin' love the Black Keys. Having caught Mike City a few times now, I can understand the comparison. The bands' sales, at times, blow new R&B covers a similarly gritty — and somewhat ready-to-sensationalize.

As for *Interiors* — OK, I've never been a fan. I liked him better when he was called **STEVE MAGNUS**. But, hey, two out of three ain't bad, right?

Anyway, this Thursday February 12, at Nectar's, CM & MC take the stage for the first time in three months. And they're packing heat.

Late this month, the band will release its debut EP, *Midnight Motel* (Knew), on Mitchell's label, Slanted Rock Records. The five-song EP will be available through the usual online channels — iTunes and the like. But you can check out a previewed track, "Smother Love," at the band's website, [cmcband.com](http://cmcband.com). And I recommend it that you do.

As dynamic and powerful a vocalist as Mitchell is live, he's equally measured,

engaging and technically impressive on record. And, given the full audio treatment by the Truck's **AN CASALTY**, Motor City is up to some seriously cool sonic dimensions. I gotta say, if the rest of the EP was as anything like "Smother Love," we might have an early candidate for best album of the year — you know, if such an award existed.

## Wee. Not So Wee. And Friggin' Huge!

Ronan points to if you can tell me which "Saturday Night Live" sketch that headline comes from. (Hint, it involved **MIKE MYERS** and Scottish accents.)

This Friday, February 11, local all-star folk collective **THE WOLF COLLECTIVE** celebrates its one-year anniversary with a gig at Radio Beta (dubbed the Red & Black Ball) — the band has a prebooked for red and black attire. While a holiday is always cause for celebration, this show is notable, as it marks the last time you'll be able to see the band in its current form.

WOLF was **DISALLOYED** writes that the *Fullerton* is about to undergo some significant changes. **Gustaf MARY HAMPTON**, who also plays with the **ROCKERS IN THE GARAGE** and the **ANDERSON BOURBON PARTY** — the latter with fellow Wolf **VALERIE ANGELO** — is leaving the band. The Wolf Collective has been pretty busy of late and already having two other working bands to think about, he decided to step aside.

The other departure is **ORIS ALKANDAR**, who recently returned from Los Angeles and the gig with local cozened duo **RED PETER** — check out his *Kipic Rap Battles* online. Penny push, Anyway. Peter — who, apparently, is nice — offered Alkander a



permanent gig. So he'll be the bandleader to La La Land to rock his tune and fortune and maybe-dub it with **WOLF**.

In the meantime, all ears — come and — original members of the Wolf Collective will take the stage one last time this Friday.

## BiteTorrent

Congratulations to **DAVE WELLS**. The local blues man scored a recent win for "Best Self-Produced CD" at the 2012 Blues Foundation Awards for his latest effort, *Where I'm Coming From*. The record, released in 2011, was a sterling collection of relatively obscure soul and R&B songs that, according to Keller, "should have been classics, but somehow slipped through the cracks." In addition to a small cash prize, Keller gets a weekly

PR boost with guaranteed radio on Sirius XM *Bluegrass* and a coveted "Blues Breaker" spotlight on the House of Blues Radio Show with **BLUES BLUES**. If you wanna see what all the fuss is about, catch Keller on his home turf this Saturday, February 11, at the Black Door in Minneapolis. You can also check him out on a pair of his CD of solo programs Friday, February 10, on WDFW 96.7 FM at 3 p.m., and Sunday, February 12, at 9 a.m. on WDFW 90.7 FM.

Welcome back, **PAPER THIN WALLS**. This Chicago-based alt-country outfit has an interesting local connection — bassist **BOOM BOOM** grew up in McLaughlin — which probably explains why they've been back three

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PHOTO: JEFFREY M. HARRIS



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**WEE-HOOEY BAZAAR**  
St. Ignace, Ashmont, 10 p.m. Free.  
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**FRANKIE'S BAZAR** Larkwood,  
St. Ignace, Ashmont, 10 p.m. Free.

**MANHATTAN PIZZA & PUB** Open Mic  
with Andy Lutz, 10 p.m. Free.

**HONEYWINE** First Floor & the  
Bridges, 10 p.m. Free. 10 p.m. Free.

**THE BAR** 10 p.m. Free.

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FRI.17/18 SUZANNE VEGA SINGER SONGWRITER

## Girl Power

SUZANNE VEGA, folk, atmospheric  
singer with her then-topping 1987 hit "Luka," which scored  
her three Grammy nominations. The song also helped pave the  
way for a new breed of strong female singer-songwriters, as  
one that included the likes of Sheryl Crow, Tracy Chapman  
and the Indigo Girls. Singer-songwriter. Now, 25 years later, Vega is  
still going strong, writing and performing with the same unique  
voice and energy that endeared her to a generation of fans. This  
Friday, February 12, Suzanne Vega plays the Tapscott Music Hall  
in White River Junction.

### LEWISTOWN

**LEWISTOWN** 10 p.m. Free.

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### GREEN MOUNTAIN TOWN

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# Diorama Diaries

"Invisible Odysseys" at Vermont Folklife Center

**A**n uncommensal show of dioramas at the Vermont Folklife Center in Middlebury adds a political dimension to the term "outsider art." The collection of a dozen anthropological pieces made by those once working on Vermont dairy farms also gives its unsettling twist to the notion of artistic anonymity.

These heartfelt constructions made of wooden boxes and dollhouse-type materials qualify as outsider art in that they're the products of untrained hands. Vermont artist D. Anore, one of the show's organizers, prepared a booklet on outsider art that she presented to the farmworkers, many of whom had never created a piece for public display.

"The idea was to demonstrate that art didn't just happen in artists' studios," explains magazine *Interwoven* advocate Susan McCarthy McCandless of New Haven. "We wanted to show that everyone has the potential and ability to create art."

Like others classified as outsider artists, the farmworkers stand far apart from the cultural mainstream; those amateur art makers have only fleeting, clandestine contact with the society around them, they walk and muck in the shadows.

As Anore writes in an introduction to the show, the Mexicans "live in isolation and fear, unable to participate fully in life outside the farm," having moved the United States and journeyed to Vermont without authorization; they could be deported if found without the proper papers.

The show's title, "Invisible Odysseys: Artwork By and About Mexican Farmworkers in Vermont," is thus well chosen. Traces of Spanish and English accompany the work or are embedded in it, they typically tell of harvesting crops, with desert workers dodging rattlesnakes and coyote threats, as well as the U.S. Border Patrol.

"You can see the letters in some places, human remains are of those who did not leave their dreams, some old, up last," the artist Ismael writes in a text alongside his diorama, "Crossing the Desert."

Another artist, Z, reaches a similar commentary onto a small "house" in her piece, "The Struggle of a Dream." Her path can take you through rivers, electric fences, tangles or over wires. You are exposed in danger, their shackles, and as even less of life. There's why I've named it after the death cry."



**THESE AMATEUR ART MAKERS HAVE ONLY FLEETING, CLANDESTINE CONTACT WITH THE SOCIETY AROUND THEM; THEY MILK AND MUCK IN THE SHADOWS.**

Ismael and Z, along with Poncho and El C.C., and all the other artists, have chosen to designate their identities. The artists are much higher for these Mexicans than for most artists who display work in a gallery innocently for the farmworkers, the consequence of being needed could be a return to the poverty and hopelessness they have risked their lives to escape.

Many of the artists position their joy at being made in America: "The United States is always beautiful, a paradise, a dream, a message," Z writes in her piece. "I'm surrounded with a dollar bill, my soldiers with guns, a fleeting night and a grateful

of plastic dishes, flowers and orchids. "It's a garden of flowers for those who can enjoy it."

This kind of visual and verbal diaries appears in many of the pieces. Despite the perils of their passages and the oppressive circumstances they encountered in Vermont, the artists often express gratitude to a country and a state that enables them to provide for their families back in Mexico. "Always working, my heart is perfectly a pain," Z informs viewers. "But I am happy because I can now money to send to my family... but I've got a little freedom."

The quality of work varies consider-

ably. A few dioramas exhibit consistently impressive touches, such as pocket fences made of Popocatepetli sticks and scorpions hatched from wire fused on one of the forms. Others look like projects made in a middle-school art class.

Ismael's piece is unusual, and striking, in its construction. "Crossing the Desert" contains only of sand, stones and bits of cotton set against a blue-sky backdrop and placed inside a box painted in the red, white and green of the Mexican flag. Most of the boxes, which stand on their sides, are crowded with locally sourced and require close and lengthy inspection in order to absorb the diorama's full narrative. An abundance of text accompanying each work further tests the viewer's patience. Too bad the show doesn't conform to the inclination at its outset: "The work itself speaks more than words."

Anore, an immigrant from Italy, has two pieces of her own on display, along with a couple of constructions made by local artists. Interwoven artist and Cheryl Connor. The movie exhibit reflects the role of one of these works, which features Connor's small hooked rug depicting a Middlebury landscape. It's called "Community Network of Companies."

By supplying basic materials and personal encouragement, the show stands as a testament to the power of neighbors to tell their stories. In many cases, a week-month to build dioramas that are as large as two foot long, two foot wide and a foot or so tall. McCandless, who has visited several farms where Mexican workers, says the artists' production took place on kitchen tables at the end of 10-hour work shifts, or as the one day off that some of the migrants are given every two weeks. The borders were tight, she adds, "for the chance to create something distinct from the daily grind."

The artists included in "Invisible Odysseys" work on farms throughout Vermont. And for every Vermont migrant worker's story recounted at the Folklife Center, McCandless admits, another must have just to tell. ☐

KEVIN J. KELLEY

**I**nvisible Odysseys: Artwork By and About Mexican Farmworkers in Vermont, Vermont Folklife Center, Middlebury, info: 333-4934, [www.folklife.org](http://www.folklife.org)







## central

**ARMAN WALKER** Most people of Eberling, shapings to pencil and human through sculpture 20 at the Stone Room at Greenfield in Montpelier. Info: 225-5454.

**BILL KAHANE** A conceptual drawing through March 2 at the Fine Arts Center. Street Mount Airy College in Poultney. Info: 297-3033.

**BURN HUTCHESON** Drawings and paintings of green, yellow, and purple. Montpelier. Info: 225-3338.

**KAREN KENNEDY** Art and design. The Life Works of Robert Rauschenberg, 2000-2005. Info: 225-3338.

**JOHN KIMBLE** Most people of Eberling, shapings to pencil and human through sculpture 20 at the Stone Room at Greenfield in Montpelier. Info: 225-5454.

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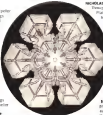
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## Wilson "Snowflake" Bentley

In 2008, Maggie Mize Anderson's boyfriend was about to tear down a Rutland Valley house — and build another in its place — when he

discovered an old trunk left behind by the previous owner. It's a good thing he opened it. Inside were dozens of yellowing snowflake

images by legendary Vermont photographer Wilson "Snowflake" Bentley, one of the first people to

capture the intricacies of the white stuff on film. The relationship between Bentley, who lived in

Jericho until his death in 1931, and the former owner of the house, who died in an old woman in the early 2000s is unclear, Anderson says, but they must have known each

other. One photo is signed, "Merry Christmas from the snowflake man." The photos are for sale at the Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum in Stowe through April 1.

Anderson is selling the original Bentley photos from Montpelier to Vermont locations that sell in Spanish and English. Through April 30 at Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum in Stowe through April 1.

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## art

CHAMPLAIN VALLEY ART SHOWS 4/2/13

**AREA PICKINGS:** Stop a top half 2012 year to this weekend! Through March 8 at Carving Studio and Sculpture Center in West Putney. Info: 438-3291

**STUDENT ART SHOW:** Working area students. Through February 20th. Robinson Art-Build. Info: 247-4108

**THE GOVERNMENT MUSEUM:** Photographs, paintings, prints and art in a new look. Through March 28 at the National Museum of the Marine Hotel in Montpelier. Info: 333-5235

### Northern

**ALL ABOUT ANIMATION OF THINGS:** Paintings and video on the wall at 10 by 10. **THINGS THAT MOVE:** Paintings and sculpture. **THE LEGACY COLLECTION:** Work by 30 gallery artists. Through April 1 at Elyan Memorial Gallery in Burlington. Info: 644-3100

**COMMUNITY SENIOR ART SHOW:** Paintings, prints, sculptures and sculpture. Through February 24th. Remembrance in Johnson. Info: 636-1505

**DAVID SMITH:** Painting a life-sized landscape. Through March 11 at Ochs West Gallery in Barre. Info: 445-7053

**WINTER HIDEAWAY:** Like art, workman from the past to the present. Info: 247-4108

**FORNIGHT SHOW:** Work by "The Night Day" artist. New England photographer David Smith and his work. Through February 24 at the National Museum of the Marine Hotel in Montpelier. Info: 333-5235

**FRONT VIEWS:** Topographical viewpoints of landscapes and views in various stages of development. **FRONT VIEWS:** Prints and paper constructions inspired by the natural landscape. Through March 2 at River Arts Center in Montpelier. Info: 644-3100



**Julia Shirar** Julia Shirar is a painter, poet, and author. A new sound, she's worked on new films in *East of the Mountains* and *Adaptation*. Her current occupation? Contributor at a festival home in Quebec. This month, the eclectic artist returns to Johnson's Vermont Studio Center, where she was a resident in 2008, with her series "People in Place." In her writing portfolio, a poet looks tired and overworked as she starts to move forward, her spiky fingers gnawing her chin. In another, an overgrown man reclines on a sofa in nothing but a robe and boxing gloves. "Unlabeled is the multifaceted nature of history and memory," writes Shirar in her artist statement. "and the questionable ability of our fractured world, so seeing that it requires a sense of humor." Through March 11, Peabody "Dele in Johnson Canyon in Barre Reynolds is a Pledge!"



# movies

## Safe House ★

**O**n thing you learn in the course of nearly 140 years in a film critic is that there truly is no accounting for taste. You realize that, for example, when some helpful critics take the time to write a letter to your newspaper to explain the flaws in one of your reviews. When I read these, I'm almost always moved by the level of outrage in these letters. You'd think I'd committed a crime against society and not just painted a performance from people said to be black on the inside.

After to the point, you realize there's no accounting for taste when you see a film that reads to the letters and then read reviews by apparently sane, fully functioning journalists singing its praises. A case in point: *Safe House*. Now this is by every standard a fold, derivative misappropriation of talent, in my book, yet I open up the New York Times and learn that the film is a "tense, tough, visceral action movie." The *Los Angeles Times* informs me that it's a "take-no-prisoners action extravaganza" that is "unmistakably stylish and awe-inspiring." Nonetheless, I somehow believe mankind has been made.

Look of them. The biggest benefit of *Safe House*'s decision to take part in this tedious treasury. It is far too good for this

project. Which isn't saying all that much. Via DVD would have been far too good for this project, a mediocre recycling of tropes and clichés from the  *Bourne* series.

Washington stars as Tobias Beckett, yet another misanthropic CIA operative who has "gone rogue." He's been "off the mission" for, we're told, for roughly a decade and is accused of selling classified information to Al Qaeda's master. Later Jason Statham, he's about a step ahead of his pursuers and eventually outwits them. If these two characters get into a fight, it occurred to me, the fight could theoretically go on forever.

But I digress. As the movie opens, we find Beckett in Cape Town, pursued by a small army of heavily armed thugs. There is much running. There is much shooting. There is much crashing of cars. Intentionally, however, he makes his way to the U.S. Embassy, at which point he's requested in a safe house in the custody of a rookie agent named Matt Weston. Ryan Reynolds co-stars, and while he's hardly brilliant as a lead role, it's nice to see him in something besides gross comedy.

No sooner does Weston's guest arrive than all hell breaks loose, the same army of thugs breaks in, forcing the gentlemen to



**COMPANY MAN**  
Washington stars this action-thriller improvement in a distinctive style of intense, cool eye tracks.

take to the streets with the international state of mystery in tow. There is more running. There is more shooting. There is more crashing of cars. And I don't mean for the next few minutes. I mean for the rest of the film.

Gradually, it becomes clear that *Safe House* is not really a movie at all. There's no story to speak of, just a backlogged premise. A spy in possession of a mysterious file is pursued by shadowy forces. There certainly aren't any surprises. There's no character development, no attempt at quality dialogue. *Safe House* doesn't have these sets, it's just one long chase scene with lots of lights on-screen.

I'm not kidding. I like the concept (and all the action footage from the *Bourne* films and edited it together without rhyme or reason.

Fifteen tight spaces — check. Character names read twice — check. Langley hints with questionable motives pulling strings from a far away control room — check. Genuine advice-along-pumping sequence — forget about it.

The only characters who aren't clichés are cars, and there's not a development the audience can't see coming. If there's no sense of artistry or originality within a role of this movie, perhaps writer David Guggenheim and director Daniel Espinosa, are making it up as they go.

Why would you watch Washington, Brendan Gleeson, Ryan Reynolds, Robin Wright and Sam Shepard waste their time on this? There isn't the only thing there's no accounting for. **D**

**RICK KIDMAN**

## REVIEWS

## The Vow ★★★

**P**erfect couples. Everybody wants to be in one, but no one really enjoys being the third wheel who observes their bliss from a gunnered theater seat. Which is why it's surprising for Hollywood to make such happy.

The married love and intimate of this year's Valentine's-week date movie, The Vow, achieves levels of perfect confusion seldom seen since 1990's *Gloria*. Lee (Channing Tatum) meets a recording studio, looks like a male model and goes absolute gila. Pugh (Rachel McAdams) makes past committed wedding, doesn't return and has honey do. She's left, and both are prone to charming spontaneous gestures, such as jumping in cold lakes. Their friends were flattered and reform. They got hitched at the Art Institute.

So, of course, to make these people beautiful, stupidly mad, strike. A car accident leaves Pugh with no memory of Lee. From there, the cinema has agonized her to realize state in her life when everything that seems odd to her now seemed odd. "What's wrong with my hair?" she wheezes while talking.

Soon we find Lee/learn that the younger Pugh was a smooth-tongued, preppy law student with two upper-class girlfriends (at par ones from Nell and Jessica Lange), a co-servant wardrobe and a money corporate friend (Scott Speedman). Now the stuffy world of the 1 percent suits her back. She's a wealthy bipolar with a propensity for whipsnapping his short-temper tantrums.

The Vow is every bit as silly as this synopsis makes it sound. Yet as films about perfect guys overcoming tragedy go, it's a pretty good experience. Pugh's story is because Hollywood's efforts to depict any serious topic are almost surely a first guess. The movie Michael Sauter (HBO's *Grey Gardens*) finds visual interest in the happy Chicago actors that's missing from your standard romantic flick about rich white people in suburbia. And McAdams makes Pugh's bewilderment as acute and funny as being injured can be, though her critical personality shift (from a wealthy bipolar to a woman who's almost completely comatose).

A romance about amnesia could have glorified guesswork about what is meant to be "the answer" and love amnesia, but for this, you'd need to read Oliver Reiss. The message



**PLAN TO MEET YOU**  
Get these first-rate Tatum and McAdams to spend the week with your general audience.

of The Vow is that love eventually conquers all when your lover is Channing Tatum. It's been designed to be a female fantasy, a delivery system for love pines and campy places. (At the showing I caught, when Lee coaxed himself over Pugh's shoulder by cradling a klutz on his back, the audience couldn't resist to *Awaken*.)

The part of Lee actually seems more like a love written for a seven-but-only type like the young John Cusack or Joseph Gordon-Levitt. When Pugh's shallow love regards him with disdain, it's not clear why the not young *Awaken* learned, or at least congratulated.

ing her sister on seeing a guy who looks like he could play G.I. Joe. So there's a credit, he does his best to subside his more cerebral role and his floundering efforts — like Lee's attempts to bewilder Pugh's love — are convincing.

The fantasy that a man like this would do all this for you sells the movie to its target audience. But if you're smart and less desperate, explanation of what makes it make a perfect couple, forget about it. **D**

**HARVEY HARRISON**

## MOVIE CLIPS

**WINTER SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE** Nicolas Cage returns as the fleeing and lost man who finds himself posing in a young boy in the tangle of the complex justice is made. With Freya Averbach, John Cusack, and other stars. (PG-13)

**THE SECRET WORLD OF ANHRETTA** From the animation studio of Hayao Miyazaki (*Spirited Away*), comes an adaptation of Mary Norton's 1957 novel *The Secret Garden*, about a 6-year-old girl finding a hidden secret in the woods near a human dwelling.

**THESE THINGS ARE:** The World's most mind-blowing CD operates from their weapons against each other and shows how they fancy for some women in this very silly-sounding advert on cinema to film director McE. Featuring Chris Pine, Tom Hardy and Simon Baker. (95 Min, PG-13) **Elgin Capital, Essex, Manx, Pinks, Ritz, Screen**

[illegible]

**THE ARTIST AND THE** A collection-star (Laurie Rinkoff) struggles to adapt to the avant-garde art in this award-winning post-9/11 horror from writer-director Mark Pellmar, which has a full black cast and is well almost entirely silent. **B** (R)

**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (1986)** Disney's sequel for *Beauty and the Beast* is a little less than a new addition to Disney's library of the 1980s. Musical animation. With the return of Paige O'Hara and Jerry Orbach, the new Broadway hit *Beauty and the Beast* (1.5 hrs. G. Magnolia)

[illegible]

**LEAD/RESEARCH** Understanding how people experience and film themselves using them and – surprise! – sharing them in this Frank Surface. Includes first time director Josh Frank, WED. Michael R. JORDAN, Alex Russell and Michael Kelly. (Minnis, PG-13) Capital, Evans, Magnetic Palace, Riverfront.

**CONTINUANCE** *Asylum's* Wallberg plays a struggling tunnel-security guard who goes back for one more try when in Panama in this action thriller with Giovanni Russo and Kate Beckinsale. **Veritas** [C] Rhyx [w/2] For mature audiences (70 min, R, Big P, 2.00)

★ = refund please  
★★ = could've been worse, but not a lot  
★★★ = not as moments as so so  
★★★★ = smaller than the average bar  
★★★★★ = as good as it gets

[illegible]

**A. DANESHGHI** is a Ph.D. student at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland. He is currently working on his thesis titled "The Role of the State in the Development of the Korean Economy." He is also a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society.

**THE DESCENDANTS** In *George Clooney plays a* *lawyer* *grappling with fatherly concerns after* *his wife suffers an accident in his second drama* *From Justin to Kelly* *(Hallmark/Clooney, NBC)* *Ben Bridges and Judy Lewis (TNT)* *R. Liss, Producer* *George Clooney*

**EXTREMELY CLOSE AND INCREDIBLY CLOSELY KNOWN**  
An 11-year-old New Yorker (Thomson) is the sister of a completely autistic 13-year-old (Tom, 10-11) who died in the 9/11 attacks. In a dramatic scene on the street by Jonathan Seltzer (see *With Samira*), the boy and his sister are together. *Thomson* (the brother)

**THE GREYHOUND** is the latest installment of America's Love to Watch Liar-Nose-on-TV. The star plays his last big-screen leading role in the well-rehearsed Al Pacino-led ensemble piece about a plane crash, with Pacino's Edge taking over from Pacino's Joe (The 400 Blows). Pacino directed OFFICER & A GENTLEMAN (1997).

**WJONES** Martin Jones is a young graduate in electrical and electronic technology who has just completed his final year of a five-year course at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. He is currently working as a research assistant in the department of electrical and electronic engineering. He is also a member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers.

**THE MONASTERY** (cast alert) Meryl Streep plays Margaret, Thatcher. Erikson says female prime ministers in this soap opera lived as Phyllida (Muriel Nazzari) lived with 200 Broadway as Oliver Thatcher (305 min PG-13, Rhythmic, Mosaic, Palace)

**JOURNEY 2: THE HYPERIONALS (SLAND)**  
*Shenandoah* Packer added to *Return the Fire*, which is the family adventure *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. This time around, it's a sci-fi/Josh Hutcherson and he's trapped (*Wayne* Jensen) against an unbreakable steel hull that's sending a distress signal. Will Victoria Rodriguez and Spencer (and Lili Ginter), two people described [54 min PG, Razz Capital 2-12] *Evans (12)* *Hayden (12-14)* *Marysol Palace (Kane) (14)*

**POP WEEK WITH MARILYN** **W** Michelle Williams plays a young Marilyn Monroe in *My Blue Heaven* about the first job she got in Hollywood and the snowfall in total with Mike Nichols. *Just Henry*, and *Kenneth* *Foray* on *Louise* *Bliss*. *Simon* *Durbin* directed *On the 10th* *Day*.

**ONE FOR THE MONEY** Katharine Anglin/John DePamphilis Plots, as out of work Jersey private takes a gig that gives her real jumpers. In this adapted play by Judd, Evans visits a dead selling street. Mystery meat 10th case. With Jason O'Hair and John Lapinskas, Julie Anne [The Last Song]. Judd directed. 10:00 min, PG-13 (Lives, Love, Wapnita).

**THE OSCAR-NOMINATED SHORT FILMS LISTED  
CONCLUDE TO BRAD PETERSON'S NOMINATION AT 1995  
SHOWCASE. Check separate feature for animated  
feature films and documentary short subjects. (100  
mins. N.Y. State)**

**SAFE HOUSES** A reporter from the CIA's Central Intelligence Agency is hiding out in a less-than-ideal apartment in a New York City hotel. The CIA is looking for a safe house for a CIA officer who is being hunted by the FBI. The CIA is looking for a safe house for a CIA officer who is being hunted by the FBI. The CIA is looking for a safe house for a CIA officer who is being hunted by the FBI.

**STAR WARS: EPISODE 3 THE PHANTOM MENACE**  
**IN 3-D!** You probably won't see it. Just think it's 2-D. Director George Lucas jumps on the bandwagon to put his space opera about little neofuturists. And now he's even added off-world creatures. With Ewan McGregor, Natalie Portman,

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College Hall Chapel
- **The Callithumpian Consort**  
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- **Vermont Jazz Ensemble**  
Friday, February 17th 7:30pm  
College Hall Chapel

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# SINGLE? TAKEN? NOT SURE?

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SEVEN DAYS PERSONALS

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## ONLY \$5 STOP LIGHT PARTY

SAT. FEB. 18

HIGHER GROUND  
SHOWCASE LOUNGE

8 p.m. 'til the lights go out...

Top Hat Entertainment will be  
spinning tunes all night long.

Come early to avoid  
"traffic" at the door!

**TAKEN**  
or not looking



**USE CAUTION**  
(it's complicated),  
but still open to  
advances...



### HOW IT WORKS

Wear one of the  
Stop Light colors  
to indicate your  
relationship  
status.

Or just  
"accidentally"  
with the  
appropriate color  
Seven Days will  
have items to  
help show your  
"colors" as well.

**SINGLE**  
and looking  
for love!









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